

**INCLUSION OF ABORIGINAL CONTENT
INTO THE CURRICULUM:
STUDENT AND TEACHER PERSPECTIVES**

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By

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ABSTRACT

Presenting the curriculum from an Aboriginal perspective and/or including Aboriginal content in the curriculum is an important alternative to perspectives many students are accustomed to. In the past, the Aboriginal perspective has not been a recognized or perhaps respected way of teaching; however this is beginning to change. This study explores student and teacher identity when the curriculum is either presented from an Aboriginal perspective or when Aboriginal content is included in lessons; it also explores potential benefits for all students.

This study addressed the following questions: 1) What differences are made, if any, for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students when the curriculum is presented from an Aboriginal perspective? 2) What differences are made, if any, for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students when Aboriginal content is included in the curriculum? 3) How are teacher and student identities affected when either the curriculum is presented from an Aboriginal perspective or Aboriginal content is included?

Using the case study qualitative research method teachers and students were interviewed to gain an understanding of how their identities may or may not have been affected. The research from this study indicated that from the teachers perspective all students, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike, benefit in many ways when either the curriculum was presented from an Aboriginal perspective or when Aboriginal content is included in classroom lessons. The research also indicated that teacher and student identities shift over time and may possibly be, although not necessarily, affected when the curriculum is presented in this manner. The results of this study indicated that there were benefits for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students when the curriculum is presented from an Aboriginal perspective or when Aboriginal content is included. The results of this study also indicated that when student and teacher identities are affected, they are affected in a positive manner.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE BEGINNING OF MY JOURNEY

Teachings I was given as a child, either from my mother or schoolteachers, have stayed with me until the present and will remain for my lifetime. As Aboriginal people we have a tendency to begin a conversation with an introduction of ourselves: who we are and where we're from. As I have learned, there is power in knowing who you are and where you're from. I have also learned that appreciation of this knowledge becomes deeper as you come to know your family's history. As Wilson and Wilson stated: "To get to your destination, you need to know where you are coming from" (Wilson & Wilson, 2002, p. 67).

Discovering one's own identity and learning about where you are from are two different understandings that have a close relationship. When two Aboriginal people meet for the first time they introduce themselves as being from or coming from a certain region. The reason for this is twofold: there is a deep connection between Aboriginal people and their land; and it is important to know if you have a connection or can make a connection to the person with whom you are speaking. As Anderson and Pohl (2002) explained:

In the Aboriginal way of thinking, or worldview, it is very important to introduce ourselves. To know our roots and our background helps us determine not only where we come from but also where we are going in body, in spirit, in mind. (p. 1)

The above paragraph is an example of a belief explained from an Aboriginal perspective. My perspective has shifted numerous times since I began my own personal journey of coming to know and understand who I am. In my younger years I depended a lot on my Aboriginal peers to try and figure out who I was, only to find that many of us were sharing similar experiences! I believe that as an adult this is my journey, but that it is a journey in which I have needed and asked for the assistance of others. We must ask questions of those with whom we are in a position of trust: our parents, grandparents, and other knowledgeable people to whom we have been directed. Community members and Elders can also give direction in terms of the background and history of families and the roles they assumed in our communities. We must also listen to and absorb what is either being shared with or told to us.

Identity

Identity is complex. Identity making is fluid, it is temporal; it is ongoing and happens over time. Identity making is never complete; it is always unfolding or shifting. Identity may be viewed as a process whereby an individual discovers, or comes to realize, who they are and how they fit within their world. Identities can shift according to milieu and the world in which they find themselves. Schwab (1973) described milieu as a community. Every community provides a space for identity making. Having said this, community can vary: it can be the community in which the individual resides, or perhaps the ethnic community to which they belong. Essentially, a community of people is a group of individuals who are drawn together based on common interests, beliefs or goals. The term community can also be used to describe a location or an area. Based on this,

identity can shift according to which community they are in or belong to. An example of this would be an Aboriginal teacher who was raised with a traditional upbringing and teachings will have an identity that is intimately connected to this part of his or her life. Alongside this identity, the Aboriginal teacher will also have a professional identity that is evident when she or he is either at work or in a work related situation. This individual's identity will shift according to which community he or she is in: their home Aboriginal community or a community of teachers.

In a similar sense, identity can shift according to the world in which the individual either fits or visits. According to Lugones (1987), "worlds" are communities or places individuals either travel to or between. Lugones explained that a particular group of individuals occupy a "world" and therefore when he or she visits this world, their identity may shift.

Lugones (1987) argued that individuals partake in "world"-travelling at times out of necessity. We can appreciate world travelling as an event that may either create a space for the identity to shift, or create a space that requires a shift in identity.

Where students and teachers are concerned, there is a question that is presented: Is it the job of the classroom teacher to teach students about who they are and where they are from? The answer to this is no because it is not possible for a classroom teacher to do this, nor is it their responsibility. Speaking more specifically to Aboriginal students, teaching these children about who they are and where they are from is the responsibility of family and, at times, community members. Is it possible to teach students about their identities? The answer to this is not simple. We, as teachers cannot necessarily teach the students about their identities, but we can guide them in ways whereby they are able to

discover a bit about who they are. In situations like this, the teacher can play the role of a facilitator in terms of discovering identity. Having said this, I would argue that it is possible for the teacher to act as a guide, but the true teachers in this situation would be family and community.

Teaching from the Aboriginal Perspective

Throughout my teaching years I have been fortunate in the sense that I have worked with Aboriginal teachers and as a result I would have to argue that our perspective is a part of our teaching that facilitates the learning of our identity and the identities of our students in a natural way. As Aboriginal teachers, we naturally teach from an Aboriginal perspective. Teaching from an Aboriginal perspective offers a sense of identity to Aboriginal students because this is, again in a natural way, an important part of the teachings about who we are.

Part of teaching from an Aboriginal perspective is teaching about who we are and where we are from. We will always encourage and guide our students, regardless of their cultural background, to do the same. Part of the Aboriginal perspective is knowing who you are and where you are from, and how you fit into the different worlds you travel among (Lugones, 1987). Knowing who you are and where you are from can be a challenge, but not impossible, if you live away from your family's home community. Not every Aboriginal person was able to grow up, or spend a significant amount of time in his or her home community. This is a reality for many; however, this does not mean the person is not able to teach or see life from an Aboriginal perspective. For Aboriginal

people, it is possible to learn about who you are and where you are from while living outside of your community.

Through observations and being part of many conversations with Aboriginal teachers, either parents, community members, or classroom teachers, there was always a common question: Where are you from? For every answer to this question, regardless of who is asking and who is answering, pride was a common thread in their response. In my case, being Métis, I find myself telling a short story about who I am and where I'm from; this is one part of my identity that I am proud of. As Aboriginal people the connection we have to our homeland or traditional territories is powerful. Through the opportunities I have had to observe Aboriginal teachers, an attempt to make a connection to the students' homeland, and at times family, has always been present. It allows for opportunity to build relationships and create a sense of belonging.

Connection to homeland is important and powerful, but unfortunately not all students will have this. What I mean by this is that a student will be able to verbally communicate who they are, but one will notice that there is uncertainty or no real connection to place. This allows for the opportunity for the teacher to offer guidance. For example, a student might say "I'm Métis," but the question then becomes: "From where?" Diversity among the Métis can, at times, create other challenges. A student might also respond by saying "I'm from Onion Lake" but not know the location of his or her home reserve, perhaps because of never having been there, or understand the language group they are from.

Regardless of the level of understanding the students has, Aboriginal teachers may naturally become the facilitator of this type of learning because they understand

firsthand the importance behind it. An effective way of facilitating the learning around identity is offering ways of connecting with home communities. This can be done through speaking with Elders, community members or the use of technology. In a situation where human resources are not readily available, almost all Aboriginal communities have created websites.

Sense of Belonging

Teaching from the Aboriginal perspective can also enable a sense of belonging for Aboriginal students. For many years, First Nations and Métis students were taught by non-Native teachers in non-Native classroom settings; it was, and continues to be, difficult for Aboriginal students to feel a sense of belonging in this type of learning environment. Is it possible for non-Aboriginal teachers to teach from an Aboriginal perspective? The teacher's perspective may have a direct connection to the learning environment. Is it possible for non-Aboriginal teachers to create a learning environment that also promotes a sense of belonging for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students together? This is possible, however, the teacher would have to understand what this type of learning environment might look like. What is it about the learning environment that invites students to feel as though they belong? Teachers need to be aware of what it is, either in the classroom or within the teacher-student relationship that creates an environment where students feel as though they belong. Teachers who are aware of their students' needs will indeed be able to create an environment where a sense of belonging can flourish. One might also wonder if it is the inclusion of culture or the cultural

background of the teacher that creates the invitation to belong. Either one can be helpful, but I would argue that the awareness of what the students need would still be relevant.

Yatta Kanu (2005) noted that Aboriginal students in Canadian schools are less successful in terms of completing their high school education and that there is a lack of lessons and curriculum being taught from an Aboriginal perspective. She stated (p. 50):

The lack of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and perspectives in the school curriculum and among teachers, 94% of whom are non-Aboriginal and belong to the dominant culture (English or French), has been identified as a significant factor in school failure, prompting calls for the inclusion of Aboriginal cultural perspectives across school curricula and teacher education programs. (Binda, 2001; McAlpine, 2001; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996)

Kanu (2005) also stated that “difficulties in classroom learning and interactions arise when there is a mismatch between a child’s culture and the culture of the teacher” (Kanu, 2005, p. 51). This is a strong statement in the sense that it may be perceived that a non-Aboriginal teacher cannot effectively reach, or teach, an Aboriginal student. This may or may not be the case. Having said this, however, one cannot assume that an Aboriginal teacher can effectively reach, and teach, Aboriginal students. As a result, the question still remains: Can non-Aboriginal teachers teach from the Aboriginal perspective?

During my high school career I did not feel a connection with many of my high school teachers but I do not believe it was because they were non-Aboriginal teachers; I believe that, for whatever reason, they simply were challenged in the sense of reaching

and teaching youth. The teachers with whom I was able to connect were either passionate about their teaching or open minded to the issues facing Aboriginal people. Regardless of the cultural background of the teacher, it is their ability to engage and connect with students that is meaningful.

First Nations and Métis Content in the Curricula

The inclusion of First Nations and Métis content into the curricula is not a new topic. Many teachers have questioned which teachers should be incorporating Aboriginal content into the curricula, which subjects should include a cultural component, and some have asked why we, as teachers, should do this. Aside from the fact that it is mandated through Saskatchewan Learning, are there any benefits for the students when First Nations and Métis cultures are included in teachings? How is it relevant? Are there any supports for teachers?

Literature supports the inclusion of First Nations and Métis culture in daily teaching, as well as teaching from an Aboriginal perspective. This becomes a challenging issue to investigate because it is dependent on one's own perspective. It is widely understood that "Aboriginal content is not for Aboriginal students alone, it is for all students" (Elliott & Erlandson, 2003, p. 18), but what are the benefits? Elliott and Erlandson continued to explain the benefits for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students alike:

The resources selected should provide a mirror for Aboriginal students in which they see themselves accurately depicted in a way that enhances their self-image.

For non-Aboriginal students, the resources selected should provide a window

through which they can see a realistic depiction of the diversity of Aboriginal peoples. (p. 18)

The importance of the selection of resources is brought to life with this perspective. Here the argument is made toward the possibility of the potential benefits for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in the same learning environment.

Student and Teacher Perspectives

There are many perspectives that can be considered when incorporating First Nations and Métis content into the curricula. I will be looking closely at two: the students' perspective and the teachers' perspective. Who benefits? Teachers, students, or both? The role of perspective is very important. It has been my experience, through teaching the ACE (Aboriginal Cultural Engagement) Program at City Park Collegiate in the Saskatoon Public School Division, that there are benefits to both teachers and students. The purpose of the ACE Program is to strengthen student identity through (re)introducing young Aboriginal female students to their culture. These students are currently working at either the Grade 10 or 11 levels and they also have life circumstances that have interrupted their schooling at some point. The class is designed in such a way that the students remain with the same teacher throughout the course of the day, for the entire trimester, whereby all of the subject areas are taught from an Aboriginal perspective with the inclusion of Aboriginal content. The teacher creates a sense of belonging through the inclusion of First Nations and Métis content and through teaching from the Aboriginal perspective. In this situation the benefit for the teacher is

that trust is built and more teaching is able to take place. The students benefit through the sense of belonging that is created, as well as learning from a perspective that is familiar to him or her.

Teachers may also benefit from the Aboriginal perspective; although I did not confirm the results by having follow up conversations with teachers, I can assume that many teachers and educational associates had an appreciation for the information I gave from my own Métis perspective. When I was teaching in the inner city I was at a school where approximately 90% of the student population was of Aboriginal ancestry. I learned from the students, myself and colleagues that teaching in the inner city is consuming. It can exhaust you physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Having said this, rewards can often be overwhelming.

At the time I was part of a staff made up of 40 hard-working and dedicated individuals. Different months of the school year bring about different types of “exhaustion.” To the best of my knowledge it was late spring when I started to hear the discontent from teachers. I approached my administrator at the time and spoke with him about some of the comments I was hearing. While teaching in the inner city, it was not uncommon to hear staff members say things like “Why can’t these parents just wake up and send their kids to school?” and “Why don’t our parents support the teachers?” Unfortunately, perceptions like these seem to fit the inner city school landscapes.

As I embraced the journey of becoming part of a possible solution, I sensed a shift in my identity. I was no longer going to simply be the Grade Six teacher that teaches students day in and day out, I was going to become a teacher resource. A human resource. I had no tensions with this because I felt as though I was ready for this shift. I

could say that I had the courage to want the shift in this school's landscape as well. Having said this, I believe others also wanted it, but either didn't have the courage to say so or did not know how to make it happen. I must make it clear that I was not attempting to create a grand narrative or "an unquestioned way of looking at things" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 22), I was simply going to offer a different perspective to my colleagues. I wanted to give them information about a few of the storied moments of the history of our country and even more hopefully about why the parents are reluctant to take part in their children's learning. I believed that informing teachers of this link would give them the opportunity to shift their perspectives.

After discussing this with my administrator he agreed to give me some professional development time at a staff meeting. This is where the tensions came to life. I felt as though I had many considerations: Who was my audience? What were their perspectives? What were the perspectives of community members? I believed there was a story that answered each of these questions, as well as the individual narratives of each staff member.

I believed that if we, as a staff, could have a stronger understanding of the roots that we would have the option of a brighter outlook. I decided, with the support of my administrator, that I would offer a simple presentation to the staff about the history of our country and province from an Aboriginal perspective. The presentation was based on the signing of the treaties in Saskatchewan and how this had shifted the entire landscape of Saskatchewan's First Nations people. This made sense to me because it would cover housing, health care, and education and how issues surrounding these treaty rights have lead, unfortunately to poverty for some. I chose to introduce this information by

explaining that we are not responsible for the past actions of our governments, but we are responsible for our thoughts and words. The room was very quiet. I was cautious.

Soon after, I had colleagues approach me with questions about students and their landscapes and narratives from home. I could never give an answer or an explanation; I could only invite my colleagues to remember that the “stories of why” contribute tremendously to the narratives of the students and their families.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to learn about the outcomes for all students when the inclusion of First Nations and Métis content into the curriculum takes place in the classroom. Teaching from the Aboriginal perspective includes (re)telling stories, making connections to Aboriginal people and communities and having a sincere understanding of the students and their background (whether it be cultural or not). Teaching from this perspective plays an integral role in the inclusion of Aboriginal culture. I believe that any teacher can successfully integrate Aboriginal content into the curriculum, which is different from providing or teaching from the perspective of the people.

The importance in learning the outcomes is dependent on the perspectives of both teachers and students. As Brade, Duncan and Sokul (2003) explained, “the reality of education for each person is largely defined by the individual” (p. 238).

The purpose of the research is to learn about the outcomes that occur when curriculum is taught from an Aboriginal perspective with the incorporation of Aboriginal content. Alongside this I will also be examining teacher and student identity when the curriculum is either presented from an Aboriginal perspective or when Aboriginal content

is included. The major questions of this study are: 1) What differences are made, if any, for Aboriginal and non Aboriginal students when the curriculum is presented from an Aboriginal perspective? 2) What differences are made, if any, for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students when Aboriginal content is included in the curriculum? 3) How are teacher and student identities affected when either the curriculum is presented from an Aboriginal perspective or Aboriginal content is included? One would assume that a link exists between a positive sense of belonging and teaching from this perspective with the incorporation of culture; the thesis being that there is a positive connection between the teacher's perspective coupled with the incorporation of culture, and a sense of belonging. Following this, other questions would be: Do the students benefit in any way from the inclusion of culture? If so, how? Does it create a sense of belonging, which in turn fosters a positive learning environment or does it make any difference at all? How, if at all, are teacher and student identity affected? These questions will guide the research to learn from the outcomes in order to advance teaching practices.

Implications

Coming to a greater understanding of teachers and students alike is of personal importance to me. It will provide opportunities that can be implemented into the ACE Program. I have been teaching from the Métis perspective since I began my career, although it has been my own learning that has allowed me to strengthen this perspective. I have also spent many hours learning about the Cree culture and way of life, which also allows me to pass on knowledge that I have learned. The passion that I have in regards to why the incorporation and inclusion of Aboriginal culture in the curriculum is important

and drives my desire to learn about the perspectives of others in this area. Learning about what others are doing, and not doing, will be beneficial to me and all students.

Definitions

The definitions of terms used in this study are provided to allow for clarification to the reader.

Aboriginal – Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 recognizes three groups of Aboriginal peoples -- Indians, Métis and Inuit peoples (www.fnmr.gov.sk.ca). The term Aboriginal is used when the writer does not want to distinguish between these three groups or when wanting to refer to all groups at the same time.

First Nation person – a person who is recognized by the federal government as having treaty status.

First Nation - refers to the lands, or reserves, that were set aside by the Canadian government to be occupied by the First Nations peoples.

Métis – the distinct group of people who identify themselves as having mixed European and First Nations ancestry; they share common beliefs and goals for their people and they originally come from a land base that was shared among their ancestors. The Métis are a very diverse group of people who come from various backgrounds. For example, the Métis living in northern Saskatchewan share a very similar lifestyle as the treaty First Nations from the same area, but do not have treaty status because their forefathers did not sign treaty.

Non-Aboriginal – any person who does not have Aboriginal ancestry.

Inclusion – the act of including something to make another part or whole.

Incorporation – “to combine or join with something already formed” (Webster’s New World Dictionary, 1994, p. 684).

Curriculum – the courses offered and taught in schools and post-secondary institutions; learning opportunities in any situation. For example, curriculum of life or home is what we learn throughout life or in our home. Curriculum is present on school playgrounds, in the hallways of schools and on the school bus. Curriculum is all around us; it is within every learning opportunity we have, in any given location or space.

Inclusion of culture in the curriculum – to include a cultural component within the already designed curriculum.

Perspective – an individual's point of view or interpretation of an event or situation. For example, an Aboriginal perspective would be an individual Aboriginal person's point of view.

Teaching from the Aboriginal perspective – to teach from the understanding or interpretations of events of an Aboriginal person.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This research study focuses on the integration of First Nations and Métis content into the curriculum and how this affects, or does not affect, the learning outcomes of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students alike. This literature review has been written in a format that will discuss informational categories that some researchers have previously identified.

Brief History

Since the time of confederation in 1867 students and educators have seen many changes to the ways in which an education can be delivered. Sheila Carr-Stewart (2001) discussed where the treaty right to education originated for First Nations people with treaty status. In order to thoroughly explain this, Carr-Stewart (2001) gives a brief history of Canada. Unfortunately, the lifestyle of the First Nations prior to the time of contact was not discussed; however, it is known that First Nations people had many different ways of “educating” their children prior to the arrival of the Europeans and what the Europeans referred to as the “formal” way of education. The lifestyle of the First Nations prior to contact was one whereby the roles of the family members were gender specific. The education of the children changed with the seasons as well as at different times throughout the child’s life depending on their age and gender and the location of the tribe at the time. The traditional education that the First Nations children received

was one that was built around the value of respect. It was accessed daily and lasted a lifetime. It was about the sustainability and survival of the entire tribe. Nothing was ever taught for the sole benefit of one person.

Carr-Stewart (2001) began the article with the negotiations and signing of the first treaties. This is very important because it is through the treaties that the First Nations' right to formal education evolved. She briefly mentioned that the first treaties to be negotiated on this land were peace and friendship treaties signed in the eastern parts of the country. The peace and friendship treaties were followed by the numbered treaties about 100 years later. She examined the numbered treaties (1 – 7) quite closely:

“Between 1870 and 1877, Canada, on behalf of the Imperial Crown, met and negotiated treaties 1 to 7 with First Nations from western Ontario to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains” (Carr-Stewart, 2001, p. 126). Carr-Stewart recognized that both sides, the First Nations chiefs and headmen and the Crown's representatives came together, bringing with them their beliefs about what the treaties should include. The Crown's main concern was the land whereas the chiefs' wanted assistance with the welfare of their tribes. In the end, the Crown made it clear that they wanted full control and ownership of the land in exchange for rights to education, healthcare, and the means to agriculture.

Carr-Stewart, among others who have researched this topic, argued that the chiefs were not prepared to surrender the land; their intent was to share it with the newcomers. After all, the land to them was, and still is, Mother Earth. It is a strong First Nations belief that the land was never to be bought or sold, only used respectfully. Carr-Stewart does not discuss what is referred to as the spirit of the treaties, nor does she discuss the sacredness of the treaties from the First Nations' perspective. These two aspects alone, if

understood, allow us to appreciate that the First Nations chiefs believed Creator was a witness to the negotiations as well as the signings.

It was interesting to learn that, according to Carr-Stewart (2001), the chiefs had an understanding of formal education, and they wanted this for their children, grandchildren, and future generations. With this understanding “the Crown, however, did not fulfill its constitutional obligations and, from the outset, chose to provide limited educational services not as a treaty right, but as an assimilation mechanism through its own criteria, the Indian Act” (Carr-Stewart, 2001, p. 126). The result of this way of thinking led to the industrial school system and then to the residential school system. In 1876 the Indian Act was created. In terms of education, the Indian Act gave the minister of the government the power to build schools, maintain them and hire teachers of their choice.

Carr-Stewart (2001) explained that Alexander Morris, the treaty commissioner for the Treaty 6 area (at the time) strongly believed that if the First Nations’ children received a formal education that they would be better prepared to care for themselves in ways similar to their non-First Nations counterparts: “Your children will be taught, and then they will be as well able to take care of themselves as the whites around them” (Morris, 1991/1880, p. 123). Morris also claimed that the First Nations chiefs of the Treaty 6 territory were greatly influenced by christianity and they wanted this incorporated into their schools. According to Carr-Stewart (2001), it was Alexander Morris who made this happen. Most importantly, it was Morris who indicated that the quality of education provided to the First Nations people would be equitable to the education provided to the children of the European settlers.

Close to the turn of the century, talks of treaties started to fade. It would take nearly 80 years for First Nations people to start taking a stand in favour of their education. They realized that their educational opportunities did not amount to those offered to non-First Nations students. As a result of this, many First Nations leaders believed it was time to gain control of the education of their people. The statistics of 1946 were not acceptable: “While there are 130,000 Indians in the country our education and training of these people take care of only about 16,000. Of this number enrolled, only 883 reach grade 7, 324 reach grade 8, and seventy-one reach grade 9” (House of Commons Debates, p. 5489). More than half a century later, the Supreme Court of Canada began to recognize and accept the treaties for what they were – promises to the people in exchange for the sharing of the land. The Supreme Court actually stated that “any ambiguities or doubtful expressions in the wording of the treaty or the document must be resolved in favour of the Indians” (Elliot, 1994, p. 45). This followed after the Constitution Act of 1982 in Section 35 (1) recognized and affirmed treaty rights: “Although the Constitution Act did not define treaty rights, the recognition of treaty rights solidified the government’s fiduciary relationship with First Nations dating back to the Mi’kmaq treaties and the Royal Proclamation of 1763” (Isaac, 1995, p. 167). The Supreme Court also believed that the relationship between the Aboriginal peoples and the Crown must be based on trust and the Crown must also negotiate in good faith. Carr-Stewart (2001) made it clear that the First Nations chiefs and headmen that negotiated the numbered treaties did ask for formal education to be included. However, she also made it clear that they did not ask to be “dragged into an abyss and forced into an educational system that

sought to eliminate their traditional educational practices, languages, cultures and customs” (Carr-Stewart, 2001, p. 138).

It is important for present day educators to understand the history of the educational system of Canada, and more specifically, the area in which they teach. History plays a strong role in all that we do, especially in terms of education. It is clear that First Nations and Métis content was not included in traditional or formal ways of teaching. It is important to understand that First Nations and Métis people had, and continue to have, their own ways of educating their children; this must be honoured. The importance of the inclusion of such ways of teaching begins with the recognition of the history of our country and its people.

The present day connection to honouring our history and including this in the classroom will assist students with understanding of the importance of learning about the cultural ways of the First Nations and Métis people.

Identity

“In the Aboriginal way of thinking, or worldview, it is important to introduce ourselves” (Anderson & Pohl, 2002, p.1). As Aboriginal people, part of our life’s journey is to learn about who we are and where we are from. Anderson and Pohl also explained that once we know who we are and where we are from it helps us to know where we are going in mind, body, and spirit.

Understanding who we are as individuals and where we “fit” within our families or larger cultural groups can be a journey. This journey offers the opportunity for us to

allow our identities to shift as we travel. As mentioned earlier, identities are temporal which means they can and will change, or shift, over time. Coming to understand one's own identity can also be a journey. As mentioned earlier, this is not something a classroom teacher can teach a student. Learning about who you are and where you are from must be guided by family and/or community members. Having said this, the classroom teacher may act as a facilitator for parts of the process.

As a result of their research, Brade, Duncan and Sokul (2003) have made strong statements in regards to their findings. They found that some Aboriginal people who choose, for whatever reason, to become educated through the mainstream system have felt as though they have experienced “some form of personal amputation” (Bailey, 2000). This statement refers to Aboriginal people giving up part of themselves in order to be successful in the mainstream education system. This was based on their perception of a lack of Aboriginal content in the classroom and the teachings. Ultimately this would have affected their identity. Where Aboriginal people are concerned, it is argued that “issues of identity go hand in hand with those of educational achievement, and indeed the retention of heritage and a strong cultural identity has been identified as the single most important factor in predicting the academic achievement of Native Americans (Deyhle, 1989; Huffman, Sill and Brokenleg, 1986; Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000). In order to address the issue of identity one must believe that Aboriginal children need Aboriginal adults who can be a positive and influential guide in their lives. It can be argued that most Aboriginal students are likely to engage more often and achieve at higher levels if they are able to work with Aboriginal teachers. This may not always be the case; if the teacher is non-Aboriginal, the opportunities for engagement may still be

present if this is important to the teacher. Having said this, Aboriginal teachers working with Aboriginal students may possibly be able to provide a learning environment where the student's identity can become stronger.

Teacher Identity

The way in which a teacher chooses to (re)present curriculum documents is dependent upon teacher identity. Teacher identity is comprised of a set of narratives or stories about who they are as teachers. Teacher identity, "is a unique embodiment of each teacher's stories to live by, stories shaped by knowledge composed on landscapes past and present in which a teacher lives and works" (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 9). The different stories that comprise a teacher's identity will shape the landscape and curriculum of their class as well as influence how the curriculum document is presented. "Secret stories," for example, represent teacher identity when they are "told [only] to others in safe places both on and off the school landscape" (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 7). "Cover stories" (Clandinin et al., 2006) are also an important part of teacher identity in the sense that these are the stories told by the teacher in such a way that secures their position within the dominant story of the school landscape.

The concept of teacher identity is complex. Day, Kington, Stobart and Sammons (2006) explained that there are numerous ideas that are connected that form a teacher identity. They argued that "the concepts of self and identity are often used interchangeably in the literature on teacher education" (p. 602). This may be true; however, self and identity in my mind are two different entities. The self is a space that each individual is born into; it does not shift. Identity is the part of the self that does

shift; identity can and does shift. The shift of one's identity often depends on the community in which he or she either belongs or visits for whatever reason. Day et al. (2006) also argued that teachers' identities are not always stable and that "during certain times or during certain life, career and organizational phases may be discontinuous, fragmented, and subject to turbulence and change" (Day et al., 2006, p. 613). This interpretation of how teacher identity can change as a result of either circumstance in life or within the profession, is comparable to what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to as a teacher's shifting identity, or the stories of teachers bumping up against stories of school, for example. Both sets of authors, Clandinin and Connelly and Day et al. argued, based on their research, that teacher identity does and can shift based on many different factors in school and out of school.

Student Identity

Considering the fact that identities shift or evolve over time, especially for our younger individuals, student identity can appear to be complex. Is student identity viewed or understood from the angle of stories of culture, stories of home (community), stories of family, stories of school, all of the above or a simple few? This is a difficult question to answer in the sense that there may be no right answer, and if the right answer does exist, I would argue that it is likely to change. Identities shift over time as we experience different situations in our lives; identities are always in the making, they are fluid. Even as adults, our identities shift as we become older or as our experiences change; this is no different for young people.

Your identity is likely to shift over time regardless of your age, ethnic background, and gender or socio economic status. With our youth, because of their age and lack of life experience, their identities are likely to shift more often as they move through life. As their identities shift, stories of who they are shift as well. As people we carry with us many different stories; these stories are especially important to our youth because they are part of their identity. For example, two of the stories they might carry of themselves are what Clandinin et al. (2006) refer to as a “secret story” and a “cover story.” In other words, these are the stories they may tell in order to “fit in” at school. Nonetheless, identity for any youth is a journey that can, at times, be challenging.

Teaching from the Aboriginal Perspective

The Aboriginal perspective in the classroom is important for all students. For many years, and possibly their entire education, Canadian students have been taught from a non-Aboriginal perspective. Brade et al. (2003) included in their study the outcomes of Aboriginal teachers teaching Aboriginal students. Through this study, it was assumed that Aboriginal students who had Aboriginal teachers were more likely to obtain a higher level of education. The findings do not coincide with the assumption that students would benefit from this teaching perspective; rather, the results of this study indicated that Aboriginal students who had an Aboriginal teacher did not achieve at higher levels. There are no results indicating a positive relationship here: “This finding does not appear to support the contention that having like role models is important to the realization of educational potential” (Brade et al., 2003, p. 243). Not dismissing these findings, it can

still be assumed that it is important to have Aboriginal leaders visible to our Aboriginal youth.

The results that were positive were in regards to classroom teachers teaching about Aboriginal people. If the Aboriginal student appreciated the way in which Aboriginal people were being portrayed, this student was more likely to seek a higher level of education (Brade et al., 2003). In other words, what Aboriginal students learn in the classroom from others about their own people, affects their desire to achieve at a higher level: “Respondents who liked what they were taught about Aboriginal people in elementary and high school displayed higher academic achievement” (Brade et al., 2003 p. 244).

Orlowski (2008) expressed concern in regards to teaching of Social Studies 10 via British Columbia’s curriculum document. The issues he raised are extremely valid and, it would be interesting to learn if they are Canada wide. Discussed is how non-Aboriginal teachers’ attitudes (all White males in this article) affect their choice to not incorporate Aboriginal content into what and how they teach. Naturally each teacher has his own reasoning behind this, however Orlowski argued that “liberal discourses [mainly the cultural deficit discourse] have frequently permeated the social studies curriculum” (Orlowski, 2008, p. 127). The answer that gave title to Orlowski’s article, *That would certainly be spoiling them*, came from a social studies teacher who attended school in a northern Aboriginal community who used what Orlowski (2008) called the “culture of poverty discourse” to explain why he thought Aboriginal students weren’t graduating Grade 12 at the same rates as their non-Aboriginal counterparts. When asked if the creation of band schools or alternate programming specific to Aboriginal students would

be helpful, the social studies teacher responded by saying: “That’s certainly spoiling them a lot” (Orlowski, 2008, p. 119). I believe, based on my own teaching experience, that recognizing who our Aboriginal students are, and incorporating Aboriginal content into the curriculum is recognizing identity rather than spoiling.

In addition to the argument made by Brade et al. (2003) that students achieved at higher levels if they appreciated what was being taught about Aboriginal people (as well as how it was being taught), Orlowski (2008), argued that “the school, of course is part of the state apparatus, to borrow from Althusser (1971), and therefore is at least partly responsible for how Aboriginal people are seen in social and political terms” (Orlowski, 2008, p. 111). Orlowski explained that educational institutions hold a great deal of power and the individuals who work within these institutions carry a great deal of power, not only over the behaviour of the student body and the events within the school. This power extends to what exactly is taught and, more importantly, how it is taught.

Teachers have the power to make the decision as to how they will present the curriculum document; by doing so, they are creating a classroom landscape that is either inclusive of Aboriginal content or not. The bottom line here is that, as Orlowski argued, teachers have a tremendous amount of power over how their students are either introduced to or taught about issues concerning Aboriginal people, their history and their culture. As Brade et al. argued Aboriginal students are influenced in connection to how their people are being portrayed through either the curriculum document or the curricular landscape of the classroom.

Lastly, Brade et al. (2003) argued that all of these assumptions set straight through this study are the significant predictors of whether Aboriginal people in Canada

will achieve at higher levels. As noted by Harter (1999), “the sense of identity and competence cultivated during the middle childhood stage of development has far-reaching and long lasting effects.” According to Brade et al., it is the number of schools attended, whether or not one can speak their Aboriginal language, and liking what they were taught about Aboriginal people, that are the most significant factors in determining the possibility of an Aboriginal person achieving a higher level of education. As mentioned earlier, some of my own beliefs and assumptions were proven wrong by this research.

Teachers’ Perceptions of the Use of Aboriginal Knowledge and Content

Studies often look at the failures in terms of what is happening in the homes and schools of these kids – not their classrooms (Kanu, 2005). According to Kanu, because Aboriginal students have the highest dropout rates (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996) one can assume that there is a lack of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and content in the classroom.

Kanu’s study looked at the perceptions of teachers, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, in regards to the incorporation of Aboriginal content in the classroom. The importance of Kanu’s study is that it looks at teachers’ perceptions of the incorporation of Aboriginal content rather than student’s perceptions. Work in the classroom begins with the teacher. There is an important connection between the student and teacher as well as between culture and student learning (Kanu, 2005). It seems appropriate that if students were learning in a cultural environment different from their own that there is the possibility of a disconnect.

Kanu (2005) explained that difficulties in classrooms occur when there is a mismatch between the cultures of the teacher and the student; because of this, the inclusion of the student's culture is very important. Recognition of the student's cultural background needs to be a priority; students need to know that they are an important part of the classroom.

Kanu's study found that there are different reasons as to why teachers are apprehensive about using Aboriginal knowledge and culture in their classrooms. Some teachers very humbly admitted that they simply do not have the knowledge themselves; they lack in the area of Aboriginal education. Having said this, these same teachers believed that if they were able to include Aboriginal content that all the students would greatly benefit. Yet, Orlowski's study showed teachers were reluctant to do so.

Some teachers who lacked their own knowledge base had already turned to other means of incorporating Aboriginal content; they were making use of guest speakers and using other resources in the classroom. Having said this, some teachers who lacked an Aboriginal knowledge base simply did not include the content at all. A positive outcome of Kanu's study was that teachers who were making an effort experienced a more positive and empathetic perspective outside of the classroom (Kanu, 2005).

Another outcome worthy of mention is that teachers found themselves using the same "common" resources repeatedly. For example, use of the same videos or "current events" was resources that teachers were comfortable using. In other words, teachers were using resources that were convenient and simple to use. Were these teachers unwilling to take risks or was the Aboriginal content too important to risk error in presentation? On the other hand, some teachers simply followed the curriculum and did

not allow any space for Aboriginal issues or perspectives to consume the center of their teaching topic.

In terms of using Aboriginal content in the classroom, Anderson and Pohl (2002) brought attention to this issue by suggesting that “skilled teachers are aware of their own limitations and handle this shortfall respectfully in the classroom” (Anderson and Pohl, 2002, p. 4). Does this imply that only the *weak* teachers need support when incorporating Aboriginal content into their teaching? It would be safer to assume that all teachers need this support but that different teachers might approach the situation respectfully whereas some may approach it with resistance. It might also be the case that the teachers who are viewed as approaching this situation with respect have some prior cultural knowledge and therefore, may be a few steps ahead of their colleagues in this regard.

Aboriginal Content in the Curricula

How much is too much and how little is too little? Some educator’s may ask this question of themselves, colleagues and administrators. Do we fit it in to what we are already teaching or do we develop our curriculum around the culture and perspective of the Aboriginal people? Wilson and Wilson (2002) strongly suggest that the need is “for the curriculum to emerge from the traditional Aboriginal culture ... then the Aboriginal culture would provide the framework to legitimize the curriculum” (Wilson & Wilson, 2002, p. 67). There would surely be arguments for and against this approach. What needs to be considered is what we have: developed curricula. As educators we need to work with these curricula and incorporate Aboriginal content in order to make it

appropriate for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students alike. In what ways do programs taught from Aboriginal perspectives affect teachers and students?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research has its origins in the behavioural and sociological sciences (anthropology, linguistics, history, philosophy, psychology and sociology) and measurement is primarily concerned with verbal and written descriptions and interpretations. (Lal, 2001, p. 1)

The purpose of this research was to learn about the outcomes of the incorporation of Aboriginal content into the curriculum and how this does or does not affect teacher and student identity. The qualitative research method of case study was used, as teachers and students were interviewed and classroom observations were made. The interview process allowed a non-threatening conversation to occur whereby the teacher had the opportunity to reflect upon current practices. Where the student participants were concerned, the interview process gave them the opportunity to share only what they were comfortable with. The interview process was very valuable and by far the best way of collecting data for this type of study. Classroom observations allowed me to observe the teachers and students in their learning environment in order to come to understand more about student-teacher interactions in situations whereby Aboriginal content is present or whereby the curriculum is being presented from an Aboriginal perspective.

Qualitative Research Method

Qualitative research is a research paradigm whereby the researcher “acquires complex information from a variety of sources... using investigatory methods to understand the perceptions and perspectives of participants” (Lal, 2001, p. 1). This study in particular was limited in the sense that there were no non-Aboriginal participants; information was acquired from Aboriginal teachers and students alone. This will be further discussed in the Sample Selection section.

The qualitative research method was of utmost importance in this type of study because it allowed the researcher to “bring the case to life in a way that is not possible using the statistical methods of quantitative research” (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007, p. 484). The qualitative method also allowed for an in depth description of how the teachers were able to teach from an Aboriginal perspective, or how they incorporated Aboriginal content.

According to Gall, Gall and Borg (2007), the qualitative research method was effective in this research because it allowed me to accomplish the following:

- Assume that social reality is constructed by the participants in it;
- Assume that social reality is continuously constructed in local situations;
- Become personally involved with participants, to the point of sharing perspectives and assuming a caring attitude; and
- Discover concepts and theories after data have been collected.

The type of qualitative method used was case study. The reason for this was simply because of what was being studied. I looked at possible outcomes in regards to how teacher and student identity are affected, or not affected, with the use of Aboriginal

content in the classroom. The interview process was the primary way of collecting data, however the “researcher can observe events as they occur and interview participants in the events” (Borg, Gall & Gall, 1993, p. 204). The case study method was used simply because I had discussions with two specific groups, teacher and student participants. I interviewed teachers who were willing to share about what they were currently practicing in their classrooms as well as how their teacher identities are or are not affected when they either teach from an Aboriginal perspective or use Aboriginal content in their teachings. The student participants were willing to share about how the incorporation of Aboriginal content affected their classroom curriculum, their learning, and their student identities.

Interview Process

Interviews are always used to gain perspective and information from an individual. In terms of educational research, interviews are used extensively to “collect data about phenomena that are not directly observable: inner experience, opinions, values, interests, and the like” (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007, p. 228). This qualitative research study was based on the interview process as well as classroom observations. Classroom observations were very few because some of the teacher participants were on leave from their teaching duties at the time of the interviews and because of this much of the information acquired was dependent on the interviews of teachers and students. Keeping in mind that “the interviewer is largely in control of the response situation” (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007, p. 228), I chose to take the time to build a relationship with the participants during each interview. Building this relationship was based on my belief that

trust needed to be given and gained in order for me to have the opportunity to gain the most truthful insight as possible. Trust was established out of respect for the participant and the research itself. I believed that the interview process would not be successful without a relationship built on trust. Provided that the relationship necessary for the interview is built on trust, the possibility was present for me to obtain information perhaps not otherwise shared.

Sample Selection

An important aspect of qualitative research is its flexibility factor (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2007). This meant that the research approach could be modified as I collected data. This also meant that the ways in which I chose my samples/participants was “suggestive rather than prescriptive” (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007, p. 177), meaning that I invited teacher participants I knew had incorporated Aboriginal content into their lessons. There is more freedom in sample selection in regards to the qualitative method as opposed to the quantitative method.

The sample size used in this research study was a fair size: five teacher participants and five student participants were interviewed. This is referred to as a “multiple-case study design” (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). A multiple-case study design “involves two or more individuals... selected either to be similar to each other or different from each other in some way that is of interest to the researcher” (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007, p. 178).

The type of sampling used was purposeful sampling. The goal with purposeful sampling was that the researcher chose the participants based on the participants having

knowledge from which the study would benefit. I selected “cases that are likely to be ‘information-rich’ with respect to the purposes of the study” (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007, p. 178). Teachers invited to participate were teachers who were either known to colleagues as being teachers who were currently using Aboriginal content in their lessons, or teachers who were able to teach from an Aboriginal perspective. Teachers who incorporate Aboriginal content into the curriculum are not necessarily the teachers who are able to teach from an Aboriginal perspective.

The sample selection used was snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is where “well-situated people [to] recommend cases to study. Also, the names of a few individuals might come up repeatedly in talking to different well-situated people. If this type of convergence occurs, “these individuals would make a highly credible sample” (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007, p. 185). I found the snowball sampling selection method to be a bit frustrating in the sense that I had to trust and rely on others to contact potential teachers on my behalf as opposed to me contacting the teachers directly. Having said this I do understand the reasoning behind this selection method: complete anonymity and confidentiality given to teachers being asked to participate. Although this selection method did not provide me with the opportunity of contacting teacher participants myself, it, most importantly, gave potential participants the opportunity to decline participation without having me be aware. This causes no feelings of pressure or guilt for the potential participant since I may not have known they had been invited to participate.

Although non-Aboriginal participants were invited to participate, all student and teacher participants in this study were Aboriginal. This was not the original intent; however Aboriginal students were the only students who responded to the invitation.

Where the teacher participants were concerned, non-Aboriginal teachers did respond but their participation was not possible due to ethical concerns. The ethical concern involved with the non-Aboriginal teacher participants was with the grade level of the potential student participants in their class (Grade 8) because I wanted to interview students of the teacher participants. Ethics required that a counselor be present at the time of the student interviews, and in an elementary school a counselor is not present each day the way they are in high schools. If I had interviewed students at the elementary level, I would have had the responsibility of having a school counselor present. With the high school students however, this was not a concern since all high schools have a counselor present in the school each day.

Data Collection Methods

There are two data collection methods used in this study: interviews and observations. The interview process was extremely important, as the participants were purposefully chosen with the supposition that they were, as mentioned earlier, “information rich.” Interviews took place in October, November, and December, 2010.

Observations also played a key role in the data collection. The times of observations allowed me to “formulate their own version of what is occurring and then check it with the participants.” As well, “observations... will provide a more complete description of phenomena than would be possible by just referring to interview statements or documents” (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007, p. 276). Observations were recorded through my field notes. The field notes were very important as they included information needed to learn as much as possible from this study. According to Gall, Gall and Borg,

field notes should be descriptive, reflective, detailed and concrete. “Field notes should also include visual details when appropriate” (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007, p. 281).

Data Analysis

The data collected throughout the interviews and observations (audio recordings, answers to questions, notes taken during discussions, field notes and observational data) were analyzed prior to the writing process. A significant amount of time was also given to interpreting the field notes and interview conversations. I also saw meaning in taking into account that “the presence of an observer can affect the behaviour of the observed individuals such that it becomes atypical” (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007, p. 284). Since this type of occurrence can affect the data, it was also considered.

In order to ensure trustworthiness and validity, the following were considered: construct and external validity. Construct validity was ensured in the sense that all teacher participants involved had incorporated, to some extent, the use of Aboriginal cultural content in the curriculum they are currently using. External validity was considered through generalizations of similar cases. For example, are other researchers learning about similar outcomes? The reliability factor was also considered through the literature review and findings of other researchers. Can the findings being presented by the researcher be confirmed through other studies?

Ethical Issues

Ethical issues were of utmost importance in regards to this study. Teacher and student-participants remained anonymous at all times throughout the study. All

participants were volunteers and gave their informed consent prior to all interviews and observations. When students participated, they did so with the informed consent of their parent or legal guardian if they were under the age of 18. If student participants were over the age of 18 they were considered to be adults and were able to give consent and sign for themselves.

The University of Saskatchewan's Behavioural Research Ethics Board directly oversaw the ethical portion of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Student Identities and Identity Development

Interviews and Conversations with Students

Meeting with young people to talk about who they are, where they are from, and perspectives in the classroom is always interesting. In fact, it was quite an honour to have been a part of these shared learning experiences. Although the qualitative research method used is formally known as the “interview process,” the experience was similar to having a casual conversation with a niece, nephew, or former student. This type of research is based upon the relationship that I, the researcher, had with the research participants. Despite having followed a set of interview questions, the student participants had as much control over our conversations as they were comfortable with. What is meant by this is that if a student began a conversation, or if the interview took our conversation in another direction, I would follow the students’ lead. I felt as though it was important to recognize when the student participants wanted to veer from the topic at hand and travel with them throughout their storytelling. Having said this, student participants were, at times, reluctant to share throughout their interviews.

It was a challenge to establish enough of a meaningful relationship to have the students as well as myself, the researcher, feel safe in the environment. Prior to having any conversations with participants I knew that they needed to feel safe enough to share. In order to create an environment where the students felt safe, I began each interview by having a conversation with the participant that was completely irrelevant to the content of

the interview; an ice-breaker conversation. As each interview began and as conversations took place, it was apparent that the safer the students felt, the more they shared. This was the key.

Creating a safe sharing environment was an art unto itself. I understood this needed to remain at the forefront of every story told. I read body language and paid close attention to answers that were especially short. These answers indicated to me that I needed to either probe further, wait for more information, or strengthen the feeling of safety. In order to accomplish this, I would either provide more wait time, or share a personal story of my own to (re)create a feeling of comfort and safety.

Searching for answers was not the goal. The goal was to build enough of a relationship so that we could share stories for the purpose of learning. Making sense of these stories quickly became the next goal. At the forefront of all the discussions and interviews was the understanding that I was there to learn; I was there to learn about the experiences and perspectives of the students when the curriculum was presented from an Aboriginal perspective or when Aboriginal content was included in the classroom. This searching was a process. For me, the researcher, it was a process that involved respect, thought, consideration and commitment. For the participants it was a process that involved trust and sharing. Although trust and sharing go hand in hand, they are not always simply achieved.

Student Participants

This study included five high school student participants, one of whom had completed Grade 12. This particular student was a former student of one of the teacher

participants and was chosen by the teacher because of the student's positive engagement. The way in which the students were chosen was through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling "involves asking well-situated people to recommend cases to study" (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007, p. 185). In this situation, the student participants were approached by their classroom teacher, or in the case of the student who had graduated, a former classroom teacher, and asked if they would be willing to take part in an interview with myself. The reason for the snowball sampling method was so that the students who were being invited to participate could decline comfortably to their teacher rather than possibly feeling pressured directly from myself. As well, snowball sampling most often results in participants well suited to the study. The intention to invite rather than pressure remained a priority.

Students were chosen based on a number of different factors: regular attendance, engaged in their learning and willingness to share. On average the teachers chose two students hoping to have at least one willing to participate. A few specific efforts were made when students were being chosen and approached: It was important to have a mix of male and female students and a mix of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Even though an effort was made to choose male and female student participants, unfortunately encouraging male students to participate was a challenge; the study ended up with all student participants being female. The only students who volunteered to participate were Aboriginal despite the desires for both genders and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. This, in the end, all student participants were Aboriginal females.

Relationships and Trust

Relationships are a key factor when working with others, especially youth. Trust is absolutely necessary and I would argue only gained and built upon through relationships. Relationships and trust remained a priority throughout the entire process. One cannot exist without the other. The time required to have a few conversations and an interview is clearly not enough to build a meaningful relationship; however, in most of the student participant cases there was enough time to build what could be referred to as an “effective relationship” (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 1990, p. 79). The short time I was involved with the student participants came with a sense that the process was somewhat superficial. Having said this, the student participants knew and understood that I was the researcher and that they had been invited to be part of an interview, so they too were under the impression that some sort of a relationship was needed to make this work.

Trust became a key factor between the classroom teacher and myself as well. I had to trust the teachers’ to approach potential student participants on my behalf, and I also had to trust that the students they chose would be a good fit in the sense that they would be willing to talk and share. Three of the student participants were former students of mine with whom I had spent valuable hours building relationships prior to the interviews. Having said this, at the time that I was teaching these students there was no intention of them being future research participants. I realized that, as a result of prior relationships, these student participants were able to share more openly and honestly than the students I had no prior relationship with. The remaining two student participants were unknown to me prior to our first meeting. The difference in the “relationship

building” aspect of the interviews was significant. There was no prior relationship and therefore very little trust. With the two student participants I had never met, trust was crucial: “trust is an essential ingredient in building effective relationships” (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 1990, p. 79). Not only did I want and need an effective relationship with the students, I wanted them to know that what they were sharing was valuable and honoured.

Trust only came through the comfort of one another’s company. This is why, as mentioned earlier, I gave as much control to the student participants as they were comfortable with in order to raise the level of comfort, hoping to build enough of a relationship to gain their trust. It became obvious to me that in a new relationship, more time is needed. Gaining trust was a meaningful process in and of itself. Gaining trust is powerful.

Once I felt as though some trust had been given and earned, on my part, I encouraged my student participants to share short stories, one at a time. Sharing is not something that should ever be taken for granted. Listening to youth when they are speaking should never be taken for granted either. These are telling times and learning moments for both sides. Amongst the teenage jargon I was able to see a unique individual in every participant. This was a very moving experience. The feeling of gratitude that I had wasn’t possible to relay.

Conversations and Remembered Stories

Remembered stories, as explained by Clandinin et al. (2006), are stories that have shaped who I am as a teacher. Throughout the interviews with the student participants, I

often told remembered stories, or stories that helped shape who I am as a teacher, researcher and as a person, in the hopes of putting the participants at ease and to have more of a conversational style interview. It seems strange to discuss because I wasn't looking for answers per se, I was simply looking for experiences and stories to be shared. The purpose of my questions was to lead the students into sharing their stories. I wanted this to be understood and believed by the participants: there are no wrong answers with this, only stories filled with experience and opinion.

The conversations I was able and honoured to have with each of the student participants were short stories of their experiences and feelings around the opportunities they have had when the material in and out of the classroom was presented from an Aboriginal perspective. It was interesting that not every student participant was able to recognize when this occurred. This goes back to identity. Identity, as mentioned earlier, is very complex. If you are disconnected, for whatever reason, or have never been in a community or space where your culture was realized or nurtured, it is possible that you might not recognize when you are being recognized or acknowledged in a cultural way. At points like this, and throughout our conversations, I took the opportunity to share remembered stories to show another perspective. Sharing remembered stories that the student participants could identify with was rewarding. Sharing my remembered stories was intentional in the sense that I was sharing these stories learning as the interview proceeded that my stories were helping the student participants to feel comfortable. This then seemed to allow us to further investigate our stories and conversations.

Discomfort seemed to be a starting point for many of the interviews whether or not I had a previous relationship with the participant. The student participants'

discomfort made me uncomfortable, as well. My thoughts around this are related to empathy: I'm thinking that because I felt badly about their discomfort, I felt uncomfortable, as well. This is the situation that brought about the realization that the need to trust is fundamental in building an effective relationship. Once a level of comfort and trust are established a relationship can be built and stories can be shared.

One of the participants who had Treaty Status did not self-identify as a First Nations person. When asked to describe her personal identity (who they are and where they are from), SP-3 stated: "I am [name] and I'm from [City X]." This was very interesting for me (SP-3, personal communication, December 1st, 2010); although SP-3 is First Nation, she identified as being from City X.

The process of inviting someone to share and have them be willing is a process whereby the individual who is being invited to share should be honoured. In the Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning, the individual who is asked to share is often honoured with tobacco and thanked with a gift. In this situation, the participants were not Elders, but they were nonetheless very important young people. They had agreed to share and deserved to be honoured and respected throughout this process.

Gathering information and learning through relationships are both valuable experiences. The process of "knowing through relationship, or relational knowing, involves both the recall of prior knowledge and the reflection on what knowledge is perceived or present in social and political settings" (Hollingsworth, 1994, p. 77-78). Upon meeting with the student participants and having meaningful conversations that were irrelevant to my research but nonetheless extremely valuable, we were beginning to

experience relational knowing; sharing based on the situation at hand. In the end, this was a short, yet meaningful, story of relationship.

Personal Identity

I learned very quickly that talking about one's identity can be a tough topic for any young adult. Most of the student participants hesitated and some even struggled when they were asked to talk a bit about their personal identity. For example, when asked to describe her personal identity, SP-1 replied by asking: "Kay. Ummm... I don't know. Describe my *what?*" (SP-1, personal communication, November 2nd, 2010). The first response here was confusion and the need for clarification. Another participant, SP-2 responded to this by asking for clarification as well: "Who *I* am?" (SP -2, November 2nd, 2010). As a result, I shared some of my own personal identity, not only to hopefully trigger thoughts of their own, but also to create the feeling of comfort I knew was necessary. The student participants responded well to this. They seemed to feel more comfortable knowing that I was comfortable talking about my own identity; it brought a feeling of safety to the situation. Having said this, there were two participants who were able to respond with confidence and without hesitation. SP-4 began by saying: "My name is [name] and I am from [First Nation Y]" (SP-4, personal communication, December 1st, 2010). SP-4 then went on to list all of the places she had lived and how her family came to settle where they currently are. Similarly, SP-5 confidently responded by saying: "I'm [name] and I'm from [First Nation Z]" (SP-5, December 7th, 2010). SP-5 also went on to share her plans for post-secondary education; this seemed to be an important goal and therefore viewed as part of her identity.

The shared information in regards to identity was meaningful. Most importantly, what I learned from the participants is that personal identity can be tough to define. All of the student participants described what they perceived as their personal identity which will be important for them as they continue on with their life experiences. Two of the participants however, were already able to take their personal identity a bit further in terms of anticipating goals for their future that brought about a sense of pride and responsibility.

Aboriginal Connect or Disconnect

Although all student participants were Aboriginal, they were not necessarily connected to their band or their family's home community. There was a definite disconnect for three of the students I spoke with; they placed no connection whatsoever between their identity and their First Nation or, in the case of being Métis, their home community. One cannot assume that because a youth is Aboriginal that she or he fully understands what that means, or can identify with it. Learning about identity is a journey that seems to have high importance either in teenage years or young adulthood. When asked to share about who they were and where they were from, three of the five participants identified with "being from [City X]."

For Aboriginal people having a connection to a home land or First Nation community is important in developing identity. This is not possible in all cases, which can result in deeper challenges in the journey to self-identity. Two of the five student participants were able to speak of a connection to a First Nation; three of the five said they were from [City X] although they had Treaty status.

A personal connection to a home land or First Nation would be difficult for the youngest generation of Aboriginal people living and growing up in urban centers. Many of the students interviewed described themselves as being from an urban center prior to identifying as an Aboriginal person. In the case whereby Aboriginal children and youth do not have the means or support to either stay connected or reconnect to their home community this connection may never exist.

Self-identifying as an Aboriginal person is very personal. If one was raised not knowing or not having been taught about who they are as an Aboriginal person, they will likely not identify in this way. Similarly, if Aboriginal children were raised with shame attached to who they are, as a result of this they might also be disconnected from their home community with little desire to reconnect. This disconnect with Aboriginality or homeland has happened over time and for various reasons, most of them to do with colonization. This can then trickle down to the identities of the children.

The result of a disconnect with one's Aboriginality, or not having a strong sense of identity related to cultural background, might be that these children and youth then bring their identities into the classroom and to other milieus where curriculum is present. A milieu, according to Schwab (1973. p. 503), is "the school and classroom in which the learning and teaching are supposed to occur;" however milieu can also include places such as home, granny's house, or Aboriginal community. With the understanding that curriculum is present wherever learning takes place, all of these potential learning spaces are milieu. Milieu is the place in which curriculum exists. In any case, these young people can find it difficult to make a connection to who they are and where they fit in the world. Self-identifying as an Aboriginal person may not occur until later in life.

Students who have a strong sense of their identity and Aboriginality are able to identify themselves as having a cultural connection to their family, homeland, or First Nation. The student participants interviewed who spoke openly about their connection to either their First Nation or Métis community spoke about this connection with pride. Three of the student participants had a connection to their Aboriginal communities; in all three cases, a First Nations. Two of the students spoke of this with pride: SP-4 stated: “Well, I originate from [First Nation Y], that’s my band. I was born in [City V] and was raised in [Aboriginal Community W] and now I’m in [City X]” (SP-4, personal communication, December 1st, 2010). This participant had a strong understanding of where her family had been and where her family originated. The second student that responded with a sense of pride explained: “I’m [name] and I’m from [First Nation Y]. I’m [age] and I’m going to school – upgrading and then I’m going to [post secondary institution]” (SP-5, personal communication, December 7th, 2010). This particular student seemed to have a strong connection to her First Nation, as well as the city in which she currently lives and her future, or sense of direction.

Identity in the Classroom

It was a challenge for students to recognize themselves as having an identity in the classroom. There was noticeable confusion and understanding around this. The student participants were unable to see how their personal and Aboriginal identities played a role in the classroom. Once it was discussed, it became very clear to them how their identities did, in fact, play a strong role in their learning environments. SP-1 responded by saying: “Play a *role*? Sometimes. Days like when there was an

assignment and they were telling us to write like a poem or something... That's where my personality of being an artist was where I could dive into my assignment" SP-1, personal communication, November 2nd, 2010). After some thought and discussion, SP-1 described herself as an artist. SP-4 explained she wanted to learn more about the history of Aboriginal people: "It would be the reason why I chose Native Studies" (SP-4, personal communication, December 1st, 2010). This student had a desire to learn more about the history of her people in order to connect it to her own identity.

Through this part of the interview process, I realized that the student participants who were able to talk about their personal identities in the classroom did so with pride. I believe this was because a sense of belonging was present in their individual classrooms. Another student participant who was able to answer according to identity told a short story:

Well, ya... Just recently in English they asked in like my culture if we had magical names or whatever – or like names that had been given to us. So I brought up like First Nations that you get Indian names that you get from like sweats and stuff. So I told them about my name and how it resembles me and everything so. Ya, then I had girls coming up to me and asking me the question and I would give them the answer so I was like helping them out. (SP-5, personal communication, December 7th, 2010).

A student participant identified her role in the classroom as being connected to the subject enjoyed the most: "I like psychology because it talks about like how people have different disorders and I find that interesting. I like English because I like to write about myself (laughs uncomfortably)" (SP-3, personal communication, December 1st, 2010). In

the end, all students were able to give examples of how they fit into their learning environment, but it wasn't always connected to their personal identities.

Presentation from an Aboriginal Perspective: Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Teachers

Curriculum is all around us; it is in the classroom, on the playground, in our homes, on public transport and in our offices. When school curriculum is discussed, we tend to think about curriculum documents. These are the documents that teachers are legally bound to use and cover throughout their courses. There are many ways to present information from a curriculum guide. Each teacher will have his or her own style and influence or perspective on what is taught, and students will have their own interpretations of this information. Both student and teacher identities play a role in curriculum in the classroom. If the teacher and student share similar views the student may be in an environment where more is taught and more is learned. Teachers able to teach from an Aboriginal perspective may be able to reach more students; they are able to provide a perspective that not every teacher can. The Aboriginal perspective can be quite powerful in the sense that it is still, for whatever reasons, rare but mind opening for students.

Asking student participants about the presentation of the curriculum document in their classroom brought about a variety of responses. A student participant explained that when the curriculum is presented from an Aboriginal perspective it made her feel "more connected" to what she was learning (SP-1, personal communication, November 2nd, 2010). Another participant responded by saying that it was "nice for the teacher to take the time to learn about us" (SP-4, personal communication, December 1st, 2010).

Another response was “you can feel it if someone is talking about your ancestry because that makes you more interested” (SP-1, personal communication, November 2nd, 2010). Lastly, it was also explained in the sense that the student felt “more connected, like I would connect to it [the content] more than usual” (SP-2, personal communication, November 2nd, 2010). This student explained that this was difficult to put into words, because there was more of a feeling associated with it. Although this student explained that the feeling was positive it was still difficult to explain.

Presenting the curriculum from an Aboriginal perspective was also explained by the students in the sense of a justification of the history of their people. They appreciated being able to learn about their people and their history rather than always learning about the histories of others. SP-2 explained: “We’re in their class where their background is being taught all the time” (SP-2, personal communication, November 2nd, 2010).

When presenting from an Aboriginal perspective, teachers who are able to do this are more likely to personalize their lessons; they are able to put life into what they are teaching. Students recognize this, and as a result, Aboriginal students are more likely to feel acknowledged. Presenting curriculum from an Aboriginal perspective was important to the students as well. SP-2 described it as being important because “you don’t really hear it a lot [referring to discussions around Aboriginal issues]” (SP-2, personal communication, November 2nd, 2010). SP-1 personalized the information: “Me growing up I haven’t had people teach me anything about my Aboriginal ancestry or anything so I find it really interesting because I don’t know this stuff” (SP-1, personal communication, November 2nd, 2010).

Aside from the positive responses, one student participant explained that presentation of the curriculum from an Aboriginal perspective is not always important. This student felt that the Aboriginal perspective was more important in some situations and less important in others. According to this student it depends on the subject being taught.

Student Identity

Through this study I learned that discussing student and personal identity can appear to be a foreign concept to youth. When presented with questions regarding identity, student participants needed clarification. When clarification was given and as the interviews moved forward, my ideas and wonders about identity were woven into the conversations and interview questions. It was my experience that once the concept of student and personal identity was clarified, the student participants openly partook in the conversations sharing stories and lived experiences. These conversations were valuable.

Student participants were invited to talk about their student identities, where they saw themselves fitting in the classroom and within the landscape of the school. Some of the participants explained that their identities were affected, but for others, the response was the opposite. One of the participants explained that it was helpful for others to have more knowledge about ceremonies. Another student participant expressed that it did affect her identity, but was unable to express how, whereas SP-2 explained that it made her identity “a little bit stronger” (SP-2, personal communication, November 2nd, 2010). SP-3 explained that her personal identity did not shift according to how the curriculum was presented. Having said this, SP-3 also explained that presentation of the curriculum from

an Aboriginal perspective was helpful in learning about her cultural background: “Just like where my cultural background is from and that’s about it. It doesn’t identify me as a person” (SP-3, personal communication, December 1st, 2010). Similarly, SP-4 also explained that her identity was not affected but that the Aboriginal perspective was helpful: “I guess it’s good to relate and to be comfortable.” (SP-4, personal communication December 1st, 2010)

Presentation from an Aboriginal Perspective: Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Students

The conversations with the student participants became stronger and opinions were brought to the forefront when asked whether or not they saw any importance in the curriculum being presented to non-Aboriginal students from an Aboriginal perspective. The common thread here was that all student participants felt as though it was very important for non-Aboriginal students to be in a class where the curriculum is presented from an Aboriginal perspective. SP-5 recognized the importance and said: “We have like a very good history and everything” (SP-5, personal communication, December 7th, 2010).

The common thread was strong regarding the participants’ thinking that, yes, it is positive for non-Aboriginal students to learn in a classroom where the curriculum is presented from an Aboriginal perspective. Having said this, I also learned that this topic brought about a divide between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students:

Well, okay so let’s say in elementary school you go through however many years of school learning about them and about how like their history and I think that they should learn about our history because we were here first and

there should be more people trying to teach about us because we already know about them. (SP-1, personal communication, November 2nd, 2010)

“And we learned too about how the Europeans came and took whatever from the Natives and we have to learn about that so I think that they should have to learn about Native stuff too” (SP-3, personal communication, December 1st, 2010).

One of the concerns expressed in regards to non-Aboriginal students learning about the cultural ways of Aboriginal people was the importance of knowing proper protocol at a ceremony or gathering such as a pow wow or round dance. Two students in particular explained that not having background knowledge can be viewed as “disrespecting our culture” (SP-1, personal communication, November 2nd, 2010) when the protocols are not known. SP-1 and SP-2 had knowledge about First Nations protocols and as a result of this understood that disrespect was not the intention, rather it can appear to be that way with no prior teachings or understandings.

Aboriginal people who are positive role models representing who they are in terms of being Aboriginal and giving back to their community in a productive and positive way was another factor that surfaced in a conversation. SP-4 expressed the following in regards to Aboriginal students being in the classroom where the perspective is Aboriginal and how they believe it would help with their level of confidence:

There’s a lot of Aboriginal people that don’t really have high confidence and whatnot with what they’re doing because of all the judgments that we’ve gotten from years and years ago up to now. As the world is growing there’s more and more Aboriginal students succeeding so to give them that boost of

confidence will help them succeed. (SP-4, personal communication, December 1st, 2010)

When the curriculum is presented from an Aboriginal perspective, the students in this study believed it is beneficial for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Teachers who are able to present from an Aboriginal perspective or who themselves are Aboriginal are able to share stories and relate to the students through connections they have to the Aboriginal community: “Sharing stories create classroom connections” (MacLean & Wason-Ellam, 2006, p. 9). In these circumstances, non-Aboriginal students have the opportunities to share in lively classroom discussions that might not otherwise take place in classrooms where the curriculum is being presented from a non-Aboriginal perspective.

Student Identity Revisited

Casual conversations with youth whereby trust has been established and relationships have been built are extremely valuable. Common themes that arose from interviews with student participants were: the complexity of identity, self-identification of Aboriginality may or may not be at the forefront of their identity, and the benefits for all when Aboriginal content is included in the teaching. Coming to understand their identity and how it plays a role in the classroom only became apparent to the student participants after discussions of the topic. Student participants also felt strongly in favor of the presentation of the curriculum from an Aboriginal perspective and the use of Aboriginal content in the teaching. They believed that both they, and their non-Aboriginal counterparts, benefit from this perspective.

Teacher Identities and Identity Development

Interviews and Conversations with Teachers

Talking with teachers and sharing stories with common themes is meaningful. It can be another way of reflecting and self-assessing. As Clandinin and Connelley explain, “teachers’ stories, their personal practical knowledge, are the stories teachers live and tell of who they are and what they know” (Clandinin and Connelley, 1995, p. 25). As I met with the teacher participants, the conversations took us back to the classroom. I soon realized that both myself and the teacher participants were building a relationship effective for the “interview.” I knew four of the five teacher participants prior to the interview, but nonetheless the teacher whom I did not know prior felt comfortable sharing personal teaching stories. The stories that we shared were some of our sacred stories, or “stories told only to others in safe places off and on the school landscape” (Clandinin & Connelley, 1995, p. 25). These stories were very powerful and I am forever grateful for the trust of both the teachers and the students.

Through the interviews and conversations with the teachers I have learned that teaching is a profession that leaks out into the other stories of our lives. We can hardly discuss anything without including something from school or the classroom. Via current and former colleagues, and through the use of the snowball sampling method, I was able to contact approximately ten teachers. Four of the teachers contacted were male and six were female. Three of the ten teachers were non-Aboriginal while seven were Aboriginal. In the end, all of the teacher participants in this study were Aboriginal. Four of the teacher participants were female and one was male. This was not the intention; there were two non-Aboriginal teachers interested in participating in the study; however,

ethical expectations and circumstances came became an issue. In any case, due to the snowball sampling method, whereby other teachers suggested my study to colleagues and they contacted me, I found it a bit of a challenge to find participants. This led me to believe that teachers are either too busy or very apprehensive about sharing for fear of being judged. I can relate; as teachers we often feel that what we do in the classroom in terms of how we connect with students and how and what we teach, is very personal.

Personal Identity

Coming to know or realize personal identity is a journey. Throughout this journey we might encounter certain individuals or situations whereby we feel as though we have a particular identity, only to have this identity shift as we continue to travel through life and experience new situations. There are tensions, questions and memories involved in this process. Upon inviting the teacher participants to discuss or describe their personal identities I was faced with the same response that I received from the student participants: confusion! It brought a smile to my face because I realized at the beginning of each interview that perhaps this is one of our many lifelong journeys: realizing our personal identity.

Similar to the way in which Aboriginal people introduce themselves, identity for Aboriginal people will include where they are from, whether it be a land base, home community or First Nation. Many of the teacher participants included their Aboriginality in their personal identity, but some did not; interestingly, it was recognized when they were asked about their teacher identity.

Teacher Identity

Although there was a sense of pride when describing their personal identities, the teacher participants showed tremendous pride when asked to discuss their teacher identity. This was fascinating! I could relate. Discussing who you are as a teacher brings about a true sense of pride, confidence, and ownership. This was a common thread in all the interviews with teachers.

Learning about the teachers' identities as teachers was positively different from the discussions around personal identities. All teacher participants included their Aboriginality when interpreting who they were as teachers. For some reason it was completely acceptable to identify as an Aboriginal teacher although some did not identify themselves as Aboriginal in their personal identity. This was incredibly interesting. Teacher identity also brought about another interesting result in that it seemed as though cultural identity can play a different role in teacher identity than it does in personal identity. This can be a result of many things not discussed in the interviews, but in some way was brought to life in the classroom. This situation left me to wonder if the teachers' stories of Aboriginality were somehow safer in the classroom.

Presentation from an Aboriginal Perspective

Concern, conflict, importance, and pride. This is how the teacher participants described the importance of teaching from their Aboriginal perspective. Although all the participants believed it was highly important it came at the price of other feelings and emotions being involved; they realized the importance, but weren't always comfortable with teaching from this perspective.

TP-3 described teaching from an Aboriginal perspective in the following way: “It means a lot to me. When I first started teaching that was one thing I wasn’t sure about because I was always afraid to offend people” (TP-3, personal communication, November 22nd, 2010). TP-2 described it as “more personal and highly emotional” (TP-2, personal communication, November 5th, 2010). Taking all students into account, TP-1 explained that “it is important because that perspective is alternate to what they are used to learning” (TP-1, personal communication, October 27th, 2010). TP-4 explained the importance of the ability to personalize the lessons: “I personalize it as much as possible so they can get firsthand knowledge from an Aboriginal person” (TP-4, personal communication, November 27th, 2010). So the importance of combining authentic experiences and connections to what is being taught was believed to be highly important. Having said this, one of the teacher participants spoke about a situation whereby presenting material from an Aboriginal perspective brought about conflict with a student. The student explained that he didn’t appreciate the material in a History 30 class being presented in this perspective. The teacher’s response was to question the student in regards to the Aboriginal perspective leading the student to explain that the views of the teacher came across as being “too clear” in the assignment. It is important to note that huge strides have been made in increasing understanding among students of different backgrounds, but some resistance remains.

Non-Aboriginal Teachers Presenting from an Aboriginal Perspective

Can non-Aboriginal teachers teach from an Aboriginal perspective? The controversy around non-Aboriginal teachers presenting from the Aboriginal perspective

is strong. There were differences of opinion brought to light in this area. TP-5 felt as though the background of the teacher could make a difference. TP-5 questioned what the definition of this might be and came to the conclusion that life experience would play a role. For example, can the teacher relate to the students? TP-4 explained that “no, unless they have immersed themselves throughout their lifetime in an Aboriginal community. They can present material, but not from the Aboriginal perspective” (TP-4, personal communication, November 27th, 2010). Through this comment it seemed as though the strong personal feelings associated with the lives of Aboriginal people and what their experiences have been is a way of protecting the perspective. TP-1 spoke about the students learning in the sense that they would continue to learn but lack the experience of learning the content from an Aboriginal teacher. TP-3 believed that yes, a non-Aboriginal teacher can teach from an Aboriginal perspective, but only if they’re well educated in that area. Without common ground among the teacher participants, this topic in this study remained open to controversy.

When asked about their differences in teaching styles and what they do differently throughout their lessons in order to present from an Aboriginal perspective, most of the teachers explained the importance of personalizing their lessons so that they are relevant to the lives of the students. TP-3 explained it in this way: “I always try and make it personal and relate it to the students; they will always remember that” (TP-3, personal communication, November 22nd, 2010). Sharing personal experiences and perspective that relate to history was what TP-1 did that felt different. The remaining three teachers viewed their differences in relation to classroom environment and being inviting toward students. For example, one of the teacher participants explained about trying to always

make the classroom have a welcoming environment even to students who aren't required to be there. TP-5 felt that making the effort to talk one-on-one with the students helped to build relationship and sense of belonging.

Aboriginal Content Inclusion

Aboriginal content inclusion goes hand in hand when teaching about the culture. Willingness to take students outside of the class when providing learning opportunities about culture is important. For example, teaching about and attending a pow wow hold more learning opportunities than one or the other alone. Because of childhood teachings and lifestyle growing up, TP-4 "found it easy" to incorporate culture. Having said this, TP-4 also explained that when there is an event on the agenda unfamiliar to their ways, an Elder is brought in to teach about it. TP-5 and TP-2 explained that their connections and experience to culture were limited and as a result of this they either found it difficult or chose to not incorporate Aboriginal culture into their classes. TP-3 and TP-1 both used Aboriginal cultural content in their classrooms with TP-3 explaining the importance of "providing that perspective as much as you can in your classroom whether you're teaching Math, Science, English, Native Studies... The more non-traditional subjects that don't necessarily have an easy connection to the Aboriginal perspective... It is certainly there and you can find ways of doing this" (TP-3, personal communication, November 22nd, 2010).

Through this study I learned that Aboriginal teachers, similar to their non-Aboriginal colleagues can feel uncomfortable when incorporating Aboriginal content into their lessons if and when it is an area they are unfamiliar with; unfortunately the outcome

of this can be that incorporation doesn't take place. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal colleagues alike need to reach out to their appropriate supports to ensure that the inclusion of this content does take place.

The teacher participants (as with the student participants) also realized the importance of the inclusion of content, as did the teacher participants. One of the teachers interviewed felt that it was important, to themselves and their students, but not necessarily important to their school or school division. As TP-1 explained that although some recommendations toward the inclusion of Aboriginal content are being made, "the push is to teach and make sure all the objectives within the curriculum [document] are fulfilled" (TP-1, personal communication, October 27th, 2010) and thus, specific objectives continue to be more important. TP-1 went on to support teachers' efforts by saying: "I do believe that it is in there in small portions of the curriculum, but not at the forefront... Not as the teachers' priority" (TP-1, personal communication, October 27th, 2010). So changes are being made, although progress seems to be taking time.

Some of the teacher participants explained that there continues to be discomfort in the area of Aboriginal content inclusion and that it is up to the teachers to bring this to the classroom. As TP-5 explains: "Where the work actually needs to get done is on the lower level, on the front lines where everyone who is actually teaching it needs to be cool with it" (TP-5, personal communication, November 30th, 2010). TP-3 explained with frustration that teachers are not being made accountable. This was evident through their interpretation of what teachers had done: "Some teachers are like 'here's my little tipi village craft,' rather than understanding that it has to be incorporated in every subject area. It can't just be 'First Nations' month'" (TP-3, personal communication, November

22nd, 2010). Similar to this, TP-4 explained that it only seems to be important at the secondary level in the Native Studies classes, rather than throughout.

Student Benefits

All student participants agreed that students, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, benefit when the curriculum is presented from an Aboriginal perspective. The ways in which they benefit, however, are different.

Through this study I learned that Aboriginal students benefit through having the opportunity to feel comfortable asking questions about issues that concern them or their people. TP-3 explained the benefits in the following way: “it would bring some positive feelings about themselves... They would feel confident about themselves. They would feel proud about themselves” (TP-3, personal communication, November 22nd, 2010). In terms of learning opportunities, TP-1 believed the benefits are tremendous:

For the most part Aboriginal students feel as though they can ask more questions so they can understand what is being said or taught and they feel more comfortable and at ease and that therefore lends them to moving forward in their expansion of the wealth they are gathering from the lesson or the lesson being taught. (TP-1, personal communication, October 27th, 2010)

Aboriginal teachers as role models came to mind for TP-4. The thought here was that students who see their teacher as a role model have the hope of experiencing success, similar to that of their teacher. On the other hand, TP-4 experienced being labeled by Aboriginal students: “you have Aboriginal students who think little of you because they’re just labeling you with those negative stereotypes. It’s like they try and use those

against you. Just 'cause you're Aboriginal they won't behave as well as they would in another class" (TP-4, personal communication, November 27th, 2010). I found this to be the most interesting response. It didn't seem possible at first, but as our conversation took shape TP-4 explained this experience with emotion implying that this specific experience felt as though the students lowered their expectations of their teacher.

The teachers believed that non-Aboriginal students benefit as well when the curriculum is presented from an Aboriginal perspective. This was explained again through positive and safe learning environments where students can discuss freely and ask questions they might not otherwise feel comfortable asking. TP-4 believed that one of the benefits for non-Aboriginal students is that "I am opening the doors about open-mindedness about Aboriginal issues" (TP-4, personal communication, November 27th, 2010). The belief here is that the teacher is, again, providing a safe environment where walls between groups of people can be brought down.

TP-5 explained that simply learning from a different point of view from their own will "help them to grow as a person" (TP-5, personal communication, November 30th, 2010). This is implying that challenging individual students will bring about opportunity for personal growth.

Thoughtful responses regarding the learning of both groups were a common theme. TP-1 explained, in their view, how both groups benefit: "They're more engaged and willing to understand and therefore First Nations students are sitting back and enjoying the fact that their fellow classmates are willing to understand" (TP-1, personal communication, October 27th, 2010).

Teachers who participated in this study explained that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students benefit when the content is presented from an Aboriginal perspective in various ways; they had the opportunity to learn from a perspective that was either familiar or new to them; they had the opportunity to learn from each other; or they may have had the opportunity to ask questions they may not have otherwise felt as though they could ask. Another part of this discussion recognized that the students often learned from each other. For example, TP-1 explained that both groups are given opportunities to have discussions in a safe environment and to ask questions regarding one group or the other. Having said this, it was also firmly stated by TP-3 that all students can benefit but that it “depends on the attitude of the teacher” (TP3, personal communication, November 22nd, 2010).

Aboriginal Students’ Identities from the Teachers’ Perspective

The student identity aspect of this study was fascinating. As teachers we accumulate a wealth of knowledge over the years, but something was different when the teacher participants were asked about student identity. The belief that Aboriginal student identity was positively affected was a common thread throughout all interviews. TP-1 explained that when students hear teachings or stories that they can connect to prior knowledge or when they hear stories that acknowledge who they are this teacher believes the students start to feel better in class and as a result expose themselves to more learning opportunities: “I believe it offers opportunity for our students to feel proud of who they are and where they come [from]” (TP-1, personal communication, October 27th, 2010). When TP-1 went into greater detail it was obvious this was hitting a very personal note

and described some Aboriginal students as “standing still” or being “lost” and that the Aboriginal perspective in the classroom is especially important for these students:

By providing that perspective and by letting them know that it’s okay and it’s important for them to learn now then they make a more concerted effort to understand who they are so that they can move forward. And for a lot of First Nations and Métis students it means that they now belong and that they have somewhere positive to move forward and make positive choices to benefit themselves and their family and the people around them. (TP-1, personal communication, October 27th, 2010)

Similar to this perspective, TP-4 made an effort to personalize lessons. A concerted effort was made to connect the information to the history and lives of the students. TP-4 believed this positively affects identity because more students are then willing to take part in class discussions. The environment is safe and supportive, all the while acknowledging who the students are. TP-5 was unable to say for certain but did believe that identities were positively affected because their identities were confirmed explaining the possibility that: “maybe getting some of this information is helping them at this age form their identity and how they see themselves and their place in the world” (TP-5, personal communication, November 30th, 2010). TP-2 agreed that the identities of Aboriginal students are positively affected when the curriculum is presented from an Aboriginal perspective by an Aboriginal teacher in a conditional sense, based on a few factors: “They see an Aboriginal teacher up there and if they’re a good teacher it’s like you’re representing them” (TP-2, personal communication, November 5th, 2010). This is an interesting way to view the situation but leaves me to wonder if the students’ identities

are affected because of the perspective of the teacher or because the teacher is Aboriginal and they feel represented as a result of this?

TP-3 felt that Aboriginal student identity is positively affected because of an important observation made after teaching a class. TP-3 had students come after class to share their own personal stories connected to their learning: “when I talk about First Nations content in my classroom and when I give my perspective – the First Nations perspective – I know how it makes them feel just by the way they interact with the class and take part in the discussions and how they feel afterwards” (TP-3, personal communication, November 22nd, 2010). This interpretation of student involvement is important. The teacher learned that after teaching from their own First Nation perspective and using relevant knowledge, the students’ identities were undoubtedly affected in a positive way.

Non-Aboriginal Students’ Identities from the Teacher’s Perspective

I quickly realized that it was believed the identities of non-Aboriginal students were affected when the curriculum is presented from an Aboriginal perspective. The narratives had mixed results; some positive and some negative that could potentially have positive result as the students are given more opportunity to learn and grow. TP-2 explained that an observation made was that non-Aboriginal students “feel threatened because it’s not comfortable” when the curriculum is presented from an Aboriginal perspective. TP-5 learned that when specific events or time periods are discussed that non-Aboriginal students feel a sense of guilt but believed there is still potential for a

positive outcome: “maybe it will change something about how they see things” (TP-5, personal communication, November 30th, 2010).

Teaching from the Aboriginal perspective will challenge non-Aboriginal students in terms of what they know and what their sources of knowledge are. In contrast to the challenges brought about by this perspective, TP- 4 believed the identities of non-Aboriginal students could be positively affected in the sense that it gave them an opportunity to see Aboriginal people in a positive way. Similarly, TP-1 explained it in the sense that it gave non-Aboriginal students the opportunity to learn and develop ideas from a different perspective: “I have encountered learning situations or opportunities with non-Aboriginal students that changed their opinion about First Nations people” (TP-1, personal communication, October 27th, 2010). This was believed to have affected their identities in a positive way in the sense that they felt more positively about Aboriginal peoples.

Supports for Teachers

Content and perspective are two different aspects of curriculum. A teacher can present Aboriginal content, but not necessarily from an Aboriginal perspective. A common thread in this area was that it was believed teachers could present content related to Aboriginal people and issues by using appropriate resources such as the Treaty Kit provided to all schools in the province from the Office of the Treaty Commissioner (OTC). Not only does this kit provide teacher-friendly material at all grade levels (Kindergarten through Grade 12), the OTC also has a list of Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers available who are willing to come into the classroom to assist with

the teaching, or to do their own teachings, at no cost to the teacher. TP-1 explained that “there are many resources out there through books and people where a teacher can start” and that “the first thing that comes to my mind when teachers are thinking of incorporating Aboriginal content they [teachers] could start off with the Treaty Kit from the Office of the Treaty Commissioner” (TP-1, personal communication, October 27th, 2010). It is my opinion that the bottom line here is that there are many resources available to teachers; however, teachers must move toward using them in the classroom.

Various school divisions throughout the province have resource people working for them who are able to provide materials and supports in this regard. A teacher participant explained to me that in this type of situation they felt as though the resource individual claimed to be Métis and have the necessary knowledge, but some teachers felt differently. TP-3, belonging to a different school division, explained that yes there are supports, but they are not enough:

Those supports have to come from different points of view because there are different First Nations perspectives as well. You’ve got to get your information from different ways and different areas. In some ways when we say “First Nations” content we kind of lump them together when there’s actually hundreds out there (TP-3, personal communication, November 22nd, 2010).

It is very important to acknowledge the different cultural ways of being of the many diverse Aboriginal peoples in Saskatchewan and Canada, and the world for that matter. As teachers we cannot assume that they are all the same. Yes, there may be similarities among the different Cree nations in the province, but they also have their differences. TP-3 explained that differences aren’t always recognized.

Aside from the Treaty Kit resource being available to each school, it is also important to recognize that there are human resources within school divisions and schools. TP-2 explained that: “In some ways I would like to be used as a resource but I don’t have teachers coming to ask me. I don’t know if they’re uncomfortable or if I make people uncomfortable” (TP-2, personal communication, November 5th, 2010). In this interview, in the moment this was being discussed, I sensed that TP-2 was concerned and possibly hurt because of valuable information and ways of teaching not being recognized. This was powerful and had different implications. Was it the teacher? Was it the staff? The answer to this was not realized. The wonder remains as to why teachers are not using their knowledgeable colleagues as resources.

Emotions can affect experience, experience can affect learning and therefore emotions can affect learning. Emotions can also affect teaching. Throughout the interviews with the teacher participants a common thread about colleagues became apparent: if unfamiliar with Aboriginal content, there is some apprehension involved with its inclusion. Having said this, I learned that there is pride associated with Aboriginal teachers who use Aboriginal content in their lessons. I also learned, and it has been my experience, that shame and guilt can be emotions that people feel when historical realities of Canada’s Aboriginal people are discussed. This is unfortunate and I believe these types of feelings may be factors when teachers are asked or expected to include Aboriginal content in their lessons. It must be understood that we, the people of today, are not responsible for the decisions made by past governments. Feelings of shame and guilt associated with the history of the Aboriginal people of our country do exist; however, it is far more beneficial to teach about the facts and educate our students.

If there is no shame or guilt associated with the non-inclusion of Aboriginal content I truly believe the inclusion of cultural content may be a more approachable part of curricula.

In the case that time and lack of education are not issues, it is my opinion that as a society, we must either deal with these emotions or let them go in order to move forward; these emotions should no longer stand in our way. Other emotions such as compassion and empathy can be used to encourage ourselves to either continue or begin to teach about our country's history and celebrate our current accomplishments. As Joseph Bruchac (2003), a traditional Native American storyteller explained according to his perception of Americans:

An awful lot of Americans feel guilt about what their ancestors did to American Indians. That guilt either makes them feel sad or it makes them angry and ready to deny it. It makes them turn away from the truth because they find it too painful or don't want to accept it. It clouds your vision with sorrow or twists your thoughts with defensive anger. (Bruchac, 2003, p. 7)

Although referring here to Americans and Native Americans, I believe the referral to *Americans* could be replaced with *Canadians* and American Indians be substituted for *Canada's First Nations people*, historically speaking. Without question, the histories between Native Americans and Canada's Aboriginal people are different, but similarities are strong. The point here is the feeling of guilt among Americans and Canadians is extremely comparable. Reality with this situation is that we were not present when atrocities such as the residential school systems and other extreme forms of assimilation were taking place; we are here now, in the present. We cannot change the past; however,

we can make improvements with the actions we are taking today in our classrooms and in our lives.

I believe that for teachers, guilt may be a discouraging factor in what is taught, or not taught. We must overcome this for the sake of our students; they are entitled to learn not only from our own personal perspective but also from the perspective of Aboriginal people. If we as teachers are feeling shame and guilt, this will only prolong learning opportunities for our students. Offering different perspectives, primarily Aboriginal perspectives through the curricula in our classrooms, requires us as teachers to be aware of our teacher identities. We must be in tune with our own teacher identities in order to be proud and to teach our students to be proud of who they are; this is only possible without lingering feelings of guilt. As TP-3 explained: “A lot of things that happened to First Nations people need to be told. They need to be told in a way that won’t offend anybody in any way” (TP-3, personal communication, November 22nd, 2010).

Positive Learning Environment

Sense of belonging, relationships, familiarity and connectedness are some of what is offered in a positive learning environment. This is the teacher’s responsibility; we need to be awake to whether or not we are successful in this area. Sense of belonging and relationship are a couple; one rarely functions well without the other. Familiarity and connectedness are more related to the content and inclusion of the Aboriginal perspective.

It was interesting because TP-5 indicated that in the area of their classroom a positive learning environment, confidence seemed to slip away: “I could never know for

sure, but I hope so” (TP-5, personal communication, November 30th, 2010). The reason why this was interesting to me was because I had the opportunity to observe this class and it was, in my opinion, an extremely inviting, culturally sensitive and welcoming environment. The teacher greeted every student and took the time to check in with each one on either a personal or academic level. It was quite amazing. I think sometimes that, as teachers, we don’t recognize the effect we are having on our students whether it is positive or negative. This same teacher had a student express appreciation of the teacher in the interview; SP-4 explained that teaching from the Aboriginal perspective was also appreciated in the sense that it was a way for the teacher to show the students that “[the teacher] took the time to learn about us” (SP-4, personal communication, December 1st, 2010). SP-4 believed that the students were important to the teacher in the sense that the teacher had done research prior to presenting to the students. This is a way to connect with and reach all Aboriginal students regardless of their cultural background.

Storytelling

Storytelling in the classroom is another way teachers were able to personalize their lessons from an Aboriginal perspective. Story-telling is an important part of Aboriginal culture and learning. From the students’ perspective, learning through stories gave space to personal connections. Learning about the history of the people through stories was important to SP-5: “They tell stories from the past and everything” (TP-5, personal communication, November 30th, 2010). The impression here is that storytelling is a familiar way of learning for Aboriginal students. It also gave the students the impression that the teachers took the time to make the learning more interesting. This

resulted in the authentic learner engagement. Storytelling is a very important way of communicating many different teachings in Aboriginal cultures.

It was explained to me that Aboriginal students alone are not the sole benefactors of storytelling; all students benefit. TP-3 was once told by another teacher: “Tell them [students] about who you are and the stories you have. Make it personal. Don’t just say it from the book” TP-3, personal communication, November 22nd, 2010). This comment was made to TP-3 from another non-Aboriginal teacher who obviously recognized the importance of storytelling as opposed to reading or gaining knowledge from a text.

The importance of stories and storytelling is a common thread among many Aboriginal groups. Although stories were used to teach many different aspects of life from patience to respect, stories were also used as a form of entertainment: “Ceremonies and oral legends transmitted ideals to the younger generation. Stories were not only used to entertain, but to teach theories of behavior and ways of perceiving the world” (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 1990, p. 49). Storytelling and the use of stories is very traditional and “old” way of teaching that are still used today. Teaching through stories and using stories in the classroom offer students the opportunity to listen, find a part of the story they can relate to and as a result, become authentically engaged. Regardless of the child’s cultural background, storytelling is a way of communication and connection between teachers and students.

Teacher Identity: Revisited

A greater sense of confidence, finding your place, awareness, journey and pride. These were common threads when teacher participants were asked about the ways in

which their teacher identity may have changed as a result of presenting from an Aboriginal perspective. As TP-1 discussed Aboriginal perspective and teacher identity: “It is an important piece because I do teach from that perspective in the classroom all the time every day, whether it’s providing stories. So it makes me more aware of who I am and it makes me more proud that I know this information and I can pass it along and make connections to my students” (TP-1, personal communication, October 27th, 2010). TP-3 shared: “I’ve grown a lot as a teacher and I’ve gained a lot of confidence too” (TP-3, personal communication, November 22nd, 2010). TP-2 shared: “It’s like you have to find your own spot. We’re on a journey” (TP-3, personal communication, November 5th, 2010).

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Reflection and Contemplation

The reflection process is humbling. We look at what we know, what we question, and what we don't yet know. Looking back at what I was able to learn from the research participants and processing this information at times was consuming. All available moments are utilized remembering, reviewing, assessing and reflecting. A sense of gratitude and thankfulness has remained at the forefront of the time given by the participants to this entire process. All participants shared in such a way that stimulated thoughts and stories within me that had been dormant, some for many years. I could relate to the frustration and laughter the student participants shared as well as the feelings of frustration, accomplishment and purpose of the teacher participants. This study taught me that as teachers we have traveled great distances with our own stories and stories of students as well. This is meaningful and, I believe, appreciated by learning communities: school boards, administration, parents, teachers and students. Students' learning opportunities can be numerous depending on the road the teacher chooses to travel.

My identity played a significant role in all that I thought, read and wrote. I have learned that my identity is a part of me that shifts as it is woven into all of my stories. My identity alongside my stories, make me who I am today. Learning about my identity, how it shifts and the power it has was nothing short of amazing. Prior to my research journey I really had no solid way of describing my personal identity, my identity as a mother, daughter or sister, or my identity as a teacher. I often said I am a French

speaking Métis woman, but that was usually where it ended. The ways in which my identity shifted as I continued to travel and experience new situations is now clear.

It is almost like looking through a window with the glass pane representing any one of my stories. As I look through the window (Style, 1988), which represents a story, I can see different parts of my travels alongside my identity that was apparent in that particular story. If the glass, which represents a story, is a mirror rather than a window it makes me reflect upon my identity and the role it played within that story. So the glass, whether it is a window or a mirror (Style, 1988), allows me to either accept or question the role that my identity played in a situation.

It is the window and mirror aspect of my research journey that has allowed me to learn the most about myself and the participants of my research and how identity plays a crucial role in all stories told and identities created. When we coast along without recognizing identity and the role it plays, it is now my opinion that we are missing a significant part of our experiences.

Direction

Coming to understand that presenting the curriculum from an Aboriginal perspective and/or including Aboriginal content is beneficial to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students is significant; it is meaningful information. The direction in which we choose to travel from here, as schools and teachers, will obviously require choice. How do we encourage teachers to move in the direction of either presenting curriculum from this perspective or including Aboriginal content in their daily teaching? It is my hope and aspiration that the information gathered in this paper will encourage teachers to

either continue with or begin to include Aboriginal cultural information in all that they teach.

We need to believe in the purpose of change in order to act on it. School boards, administrators and teachers need to identify with this need for change in order for it to begin or in many cases, continue. As one of the teacher participants commented:

“Where the work actually needs to get done is on the lower level, on the front lines [in the classrooms]” (TP-5, personal communication, November 30th, 2010). Teachers need to take the initiative to include Aboriginal content in their classrooms; teachers need to be the leaders. Having said this, as teachers we also understand that there is a complexity of attitudes within our profession. The attitude one has in regards to the inclusion of Aboriginal content will greatly affect their choice regarding inclusion. Attitude will also affect *what* is included as well as *how much* is included.

When contemplating change we might think of the following statement made by Marie Battiste (2000): “The existing curriculum has given Aboriginal people new knowledge to help them participate in Canadian society, but it has not empowered Aboriginal identity by promoting an understanding of Aboriginal worldviews, languages and knowledge” (Battiste, 2000, p. 192). Battiste argued here that all students need to learn about Aboriginal worldview in order to have a stronger understanding of identity and what it means to them as individuals and as a people. I believe this holds true for non-Aboriginal students as well; learning about Aboriginal worldview can move them in a direction of understanding their own worldview which will lead to stronger identity of one’s self. Moving in a direction of empowerment of all students needs to be the goal.

The shared stories of the teacher and student participants held strong themes. Realized themes were: importance of relationship; sense of belonging, student identity, teacher identity, Aboriginal perspective in the classroom, supports, and storytelling. Students and teachers alike shared commonalities in every theme. Although our schools and student bodies are diverse, teachers shared stories that were familiar to me as well.

Importance of Relationship: Creating a Sense of Belonging

All Students Need a Place

Regardless of their cultural background and who they are, all students need a place to belong. Creating a space for all students to belong is the first step toward creating a strong and resourceful sense of belonging. If the physical space isn't welcoming, the sense of belonging is less likely. When the sense of belonging isn't strong, or is non-existent, it is difficult for student learning to be authentic. However, creating an emotional sense of place is more important than the physical. The question then becomes: How do we create this space for students? How do we guide and assist students to create this space for each other?

Teacher participants explained ways in which they created a welcoming environment for all students to achieve a level of comfort that is needed in the classroom in order for students to become engaged. Comfort is a feeling that students can give to each other as well, but this must be supported and modeled by the teacher. Relationships between peers must be built on trust and respect: "Respect is the essential precondition of healthy and durable relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people" (Anderson & Pohl, 2002, para. 4). Trust and respect must be alive and well in our

classrooms; teachers must ensure these virtues are solid in order for relationships to be built.

Although valuable, building relationships with students can be challenging. Most of the teachers that participated in this study argued that the “building relationships” part of their classroom curriculum needs to happen almost immediately. The reason for this is that once the students feel as though they belong or have a place in the classroom, they have a greater possibility of becoming authentically engaged.

Through this research I also learned that the feeling of safety in the classroom was also a concern for teachers; teachers realized that when the students feel safe to share they are more likely to do so. Feeling safe in a classroom provides the individual students an environment whereby they can share thoughts and ideas without ridicule or negative reaction. A safe learning environment is also an environment where students are able to become more engaged in their surroundings. It has been my experience that the more safe students feel, the more likely they are to be active participants in the classroom and in their learning. Participation in class discussions around issues that concern Aboriginal people was an important part of learning; however, teachers explained that the environment needed to feel safe for all students in order for them to be engaged.

Relationship

Creating a sense of belonging begins with relationship. If the student-teacher relationship is again weak or non-existent, students are more likely to feel as though they do not belong. Relationships must be built as soon as the student arrives. The teacher must take the initiative to establish an inviting atmosphere in the classroom on behalf of themselves and students. The very beginning of any relationship is very important.

Chief Dan George explained relationship in his own words: “How desperately we need to be loved and to love. With it we are creative. With it we march tirelessly” (George, as cited in Friesen, 1998, p. 43). As humans we need relationships, we function within relationships; building relationships with students will have unimaginable payoffs.

One should not assume that a sense of belonging will automatically exist; it must be created. Teachers must make an effort to create this feeling for all students. Teachers do not have to be the sole person in the class to make this happen; students can also help in to create a sense of belonging for themselves and their classmates. This is similar with student-student relationships; if students don’t feel a connection to their classmates a sense of belonging in the class will be difficult to achieve, “every young person has a deep need to belong. Children with the greatest unmet needs for relationship are often those most alienated from adults and peers” (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 1990, p. 87). As teachers we must believe in this sense of belonging in order to create a learning environment where this can occur. TP-1, an Aboriginal teacher, explained that sense of belonging is possible with all students:

I’ve had classes where the majority of my students were non-First Nations and I do believe that we felt connected to each other and therefore began a sense of belonging with the group. We learned as students and as teachers it doesn’t necessarily have to be the topic of understanding Aboriginal people but it is establishing relationship with those students on a personal level with what’s happening in their life currently or in the past. (TP-1, personal communication, October 27th, 2010)

A similarity among teachers and students is if, as a teacher, you do not have a relationship with colleagues or your administrative team, you might not feel a sense of belonging to either your staff or your school. Wanting to feel as though you belong is human; as people this is part of what we want and need. We want to feel important and we want to contribute in positive ways.

It is the teacher's responsibility to establish an environment where positive relationships can be built. Creating a space in the school and in the classroom where students can make connections and feel comfortable with classmates is also the role of the teacher. Recognition of who young people are as Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal students is important. Where Aboriginal students are concerned, we must recognize who they are and where they are from and how this is part of their identity. Teachers who include Aboriginal content in their lessons may be creating a greater sense of belonging for Aboriginal students. As people, if we can connect to something or familiarize ourselves with it we feel more comfortable.

Identity

Personal Identity

Elder Abbie Burnstick: "People are supposed to support people so they can keep doing what they are supposed to do – to carry out their identity" (Burnstick, as cited in Friesen, 1998, p. 41). Through this research I learned that personal identity is not easily realized because of the many shifts experienced in identity throughout life's travels. Regardless of shifting identities, youth need to be supported and schools, more specifically classroom teachers, must play a positive role in this; students are becoming

more aware of their identities as they become older. Identity is complex and as teachers we must be aware of this with our students and support them on their journey.

Student Identity

Through conversations with student participants I learned that student identity was not something that was at the forefront of their thoughts, even as they were invited to reflect. It seemed to be confusing; an immediate understanding of how their identities played or did not play a role in the classroom was a new way of viewing themselves. After short conversations and sharing remembered stories, most of the student participants agreed that their student identities were important in the classroom. I also learned that the student participants viewed their personal identities as being interwoven with their student identities. For example, when there was no Aboriginal content inclusion they viewed this as being a regular class and they were students like the others. On the other hand, they felt valued and recognized when the curriculum included Aboriginal content. This type of situation presents them with opportunities to share and be part of discussions in ways that bring about a sense of pride; this is where they were able to recognize they had a student identity or an identity within their classroom.

We can learn more about student identity if it is looked at from the specific angle of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Most classrooms are set up to support and represent non-Aboriginal students. I am not arguing that this occurs consciously; however it may occur due to the fact that there isn't much available to teachers in terms of representing Aboriginal students in the classroom. Very rarely do we see posters on classroom walls that represent Aboriginal culture or pictures in text books that represent

anyone other than middle-class Caucasian children and their families. This is not to say that other cultures or Aboriginal cultures are not ever represented, but it is very rare.

As teachers we are aware of the need to be inclusive of our Aboriginal students, but for some reason this component of our curriculum remains left out or ignored due to their personal choice or time restrictions. It is being excluded. Understanding that the reality of covering an entire curriculum guide in the allotted time is nearly impossible and as a result, part of the curriculum must be overlooked or not included. The wonder here is why is it often the inclusion of Aboriginal content? We must be cautious; this can send the message to our students that Aboriginal cultures do not exist.

Teacher Identity

Teacher identity was an important topic; it brought to light a sense of pride that all the teacher participants withheld until invited to share. No hesitations were made when teacher identities were described; care, concern for all students and creating an inviting environment and sense of belonging were discussed. Presenting the curriculum from an Aboriginal perspective was at the forefront of this discussion. Teacher participants shared how they believed all students benefit when this takes place.

When asked about their teacher identity the teacher participants were very open about their Aboriginality and pride associated with this, however this sense of pride was not present for all teacher participants when asked about their personal identities. This was interesting; it lead me to wonder why. Why did the participants seem to be proud Aboriginal teachers, but not openly proud to be Aboriginal people? Was it more acceptable to be an Aboriginal professional rather than an Aboriginal person? One would hope this is not the case; however it remains a wonder.

Aboriginal Perspective in the Classroom

Aboriginal cultural diversity is an important reality. As teachers we must recognize this regardless of how much Aboriginal content is being taught in our classrooms. Battiste (2000) and Bruchac (1998) both have interesting perceptions about the ways in which this has been overlooked: “Books and materials in provincial public schools do not accurately depict the history and cultural diversity of Canada” (Battiste, 2000, p. 200). Although Bruchac’s writing is in accordance with Americans, I believe this rings true with Canadians as well: “Seeing all Indians as being alike is as foolish as not seeing them at all” (Bruchac, 1998, p. 8). Not all teachers are able to teach or present from an Aboriginal perspective, but recognition of diversity can be presented from any teacher in any classroom. This is extremely important when honouring and teaching about the Aboriginal people of Canada.

The reality of diversity among Canada’s Aboriginal people was a concern that some of the teacher participants felt was overlooked. The diversity among Aboriginal people needs to be taught because it recognizes that generalizations are easily made and are extremely inaccurate. One of the teachers interviewed explained that when they lacked the resources and knowledge to properly teach about or recognize an Aboriginal nation, an elder or traditional knowledge keeper was invited to the classroom as a resource.

Supports and Resources

Teachers are encouraged to collaborate, share ideas and discuss successful and unsuccessful moments within their practice. As teachers we are individuals, but we are

also part of a larger group of colleagues and knowledgeable professionals. Incorporating new content into the curricula is an aspect of teaching that will reach more students and be more successful if supports are available. As teachers we need to be open to these supports; we are not expected to travel this journey alone. It needs to be acceptable for us to ask for what is needed in order to enhance our teaching and engage our students. Through this study I learned that there are a variety of teachers who, for reasons of their own, have not yet included Aboriginal content in their lessons. I also learned that teachers may have placed too much pressure upon themselves and as a result felt as though the time needed to learn and plan is not available. The resolution may be to start at the beginning, (re)educating teachers.

(Re)educating teachers is something that has been part of professional development since I began teaching. This is an important aspect in terms of allowing teachers the opportunity to either increase their knowledge base or learn about different or alternative approaches to teaching. Aboriginal education has been a part of teacher's professional development in some school systems for many years; however, (re)educating teachers in terms of Aboriginal education must remain a priority through professional development. This is a way of supporting teachers who would like to either continue or begin to incorporate Aboriginal content into their lessons.

“It is clear that the school itself is a filter for how Aboriginal people are seen in social and political terms” (Orlowski, 2008, p. 111). As teachers we must be aware of the reality that we, and more largely our schools, are sources of information for our students. We must be prepared in order to present material including Aboriginal content so that our students have the opportunity to develop their own independent thoughts. As teachers we

can offer our students a different perspective with information coming directly from the source. Having said this, as teachers we must also be willing. Time, resources and supports can be avenues of setback; however we must begin, or continue, to make choices on behalf of our students that move us forward together.

The idea that it is the teacher who needs to implement Aboriginal content into their curriculum is indeed true; however, supports are needed. Supports do not have to be the same for all teachers. Implementing these changes will look differently depending on classes and teachers. Supports can be human resources: colleagues, community members, Elders or Traditional Knowledge Keepers from organizations such as the Saskatchewan Cultural Center or the Office of the Treaty Commissioner. One teacher participant felt as though we as teachers can use the expertise of each other; we, the teachers with this knowledge, life experience and expertise can be resources in our schools. Supports can also come from our school divisions and school boards. Through this research I learned that school boards and divisions often have a support system in place for teachers when including Aboriginal cultural content in their curriculum. As teachers we must be willing to communicate with our resource personnel whether it is within our school or otherwise.

Another excellent resource is the Treaty Kit. The Treaty Kit is a resource that has been given to every school in Saskatchewan. The Office of the Treaty Commissioner has distributed the kits and describes them as “a bankers box filled to the brim with resources for educators to use in their K-12 classrooms” (http://otc.ca/Treaty_Kit_K12/). It has been my experience that the Treaty Kit is an extremely teacher-friendly resource (made by teachers, Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers and community members) that can

be used by teachers who have very little experience with the incorporation of Aboriginal content into their teaching. It is also a very useful resource for teachers who do have experience in this area; it's a resource that can complement an already inclusive curriculum.

Role of Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers in the Classroom

Aboriginal perspectives can be brought into the classroom via guests such as Elders: "It seems obvious that Elders and others who can pass on Aboriginal identity, languages and culture should be directly involved in the modern educational system" (Battiste, 2000, p. 205). Elders are the true cultural teachers. You will often hear people in our Aboriginal communities say the Elders are the doctors, teachers, lawyers and leaders; they hold a tremendous amount of knowledge and should be called upon as our guides. Jo-Ann Archibald (2001) described a conversation she had with Chief Khot-La-Cha: "He reinforced the importance of seeking out Elders who had acquired traditional knowledge, especially traditional ecological knowledge, and those who took on the important responsibility of teaching the younger generations" (Archibald, 2001, p. 1).

Storytelling

When children did wrong, the first thing to be done was to use the power of storytelling to show the right way. If children were disobedient, rude to an elder, or doing things which might be dangerous to themselves, then they would be told one or more lesson stories designed to show what happens to those who misbehave. (Bruchac, 1998, p. 66)

Stories carry within them lessons and are told for communication (Bruchac, 1998). Storytelling was a common thread throughout the student and teacher participant interviews. The knowledge I have about the purposes of Aboriginal storytelling and what I learned from the participants was very similar: stories are used to teach and share. Stories are what make us comfortable because we are able to make a connection between ourselves or our life and the story. Telling stories from an Aboriginal perspective has an intimate relationship with understanding or living the experiences of an Aboriginal person; not anybody can tell stories from an Aboriginal perspective. TP-1 explained that a non-Aboriginal teacher's perspective "may not be that well rounded as somebody who has actually lived the experience and can provide the stories" (TP-1, personal communication, October 27th, 2010). Stories are the outcome of life experience; they are extremely important when making connections to students, Aboriginal students in particular because this is part of teaching and learning they are familiar with. When asked about creating a sense of belonging, TP-4 related it directly to storytelling: "It draws into the storytelling and they can draw from their past experiences" TP-4, November 27th, 2010). Students are naturally going to feel a connection to ways of knowing and learning they are already familiar with.

Through interviews with the teacher participants I learned that teaching through stories or using storytelling in the classroom can become a bit controversial in the sense that they felt as though non-Aboriginal teachers are not normally in a position to tell stories from an Aboriginal perspective, whereas many (but not all) Aboriginal teachers are. Having explained this, it was also known that stories are a large part of many Aboriginal cultures and it is important to incorporate this into the classroom and

curriculum; however teachers are going to have to educate themselves in this way of the culture and supports will be needed. What I mean by this is that Aboriginal people, knowledgeable in this area, will have to be brought in to the classroom. Familiarity through stories is powerful for children. Whether positive or negative it brings about a sense of knowing, and one would hope a sense of comfort.

Research Journey

I believe that a research journey travels over a temporal landscape. This journey has a past, a present, and a future. I continue to travel my journey partially on a professional knowledge landscape (Clandinin et al., 2006) and partially within my own personal landscape. Clandinin et al. (2006) describe the professional knowledge landscape as “a landscape narratively constructed with historical, moral, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions” (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 6). My journey began, I believe the first year I began my teaching career. I quickly became aware of the lack of representation of Aboriginal content in many schools. My personal landscape included my own personal learning journey in regards to Aboriginal people, who I was and where I was from. This quickly became included in my teaching although it seemed to have an awkward place. Teaching core-French was a challenging task in and of itself, but I was strong willed and believed I could still create a space within this teaching assignment for Aboriginal content. This part of my journey continues to travel with me to this day. It is present wherever I am within my profession.

My journey of Aboriginal content inclusion is temporal. I learned that an important part of this experience was that teachers and students alike wanted to learn.

The question was: Where do we begin? This brings me back to the (re)education of teachers.

Within this journey I experienced a significant amount of learning, researching and sharing. Not one of these aspects could have existed without the other. Each aspect had to be respected. The journey took different directions and my teacher identity shifted as it continued and took upon a shape of its own.

Learning: Myself

The time and effort that the learning required was personal. It required complete sacrifice from life's daily tasks and other responsibilities. When my learning around Aboriginal perspective and identity first began, it was very self centered. It was primarily about me, my shifting identity, my teaching and my learning. This became part of my cover story: Tammy Chief, graduate student. I enjoyed it although it came at a price. It meant time away from home and work; those around me weren't benefiting the ways in which I was. It was a very personal journey.

I traveled this journey with intense emotion. Guilt was a feeling associated with the sacrifices being made; there were many missed games, concerts, and family events. As mentioned earlier, when learning something that is new to you, supports are needed. This was a journey I traveled alone; however I could not have traveled alone. I had many supports.

My learning journey was also a way of leading by example with my own children. Through the continuation of my own education an area whereby I felt a passion, I can only hope that my children and family can appreciate its importance and significance.

Researching: Participants

As my learning continued and as I prepared to go out into the field to conduct my research, the process continued to be fairly self-centered. It wasn't long after my first interview that a major shift in my cover story as researcher occurred: I realized that my work was no longer centered around me. My teacher and student participants came to the forefront of my research. I also realized that their willingness to share and assist me in my learning must be honoured. I had to put my participants first: this was about them; without them my learning and the research around teacher and student identity would not have been possible. I realized that the stories they were willing to share would benefit many. This caused another shift in my cover story, and my journey continued.

Sharing: Community

Sharing what I have learned with my colleagues within the teaching community is important. Sharing this information is a way of communicating with other teachers. It's a way of encouraging them to challenge their ways of presenting curricula. It is a way of bringing life to the stories of my teacher and student participants and their views around presenting curricula from an Aboriginal perspective.

It is my hope, that through this journey or research and learning that I will invite and encourage my colleagues to take steps where they are uncomfortable. I will support them in any way that I can when they choose to, or as they continue to incorporate Aboriginal content into their teaching. I believe all teachers need support in this area whether it is from colleagues, community members, organizations, Traditional Knowledge Keepers or Elders. We have to encourage each other to be open to change;

we must understand that there are benefits for all students when we include Aboriginal cultural content in our schools and in our teaching.

Recommendations: Four Common Places (Schwab)

Joseph Schwab wrote an article in 1973 entitled “The Practical 3: Translation into Curriculum.” This article discusses what Schwab believes is essential in terms of the collaboration of designing curriculum. Schwab strongly believed, in terms of the four common places, that “none of these can be omitted without omitting a vital factor in educational thought and practice” (Schwab, 1973, p. 509). As we design curricula for our classrooms today, we will more often than not continue to find ourselves using Schwab’s four common places: the learner, the teacher, the milieu and the subject matter. The four common places are able to be utilized to demonstrate how curriculum can foster the use of Aboriginal content.

Learner

Teachers are there to teach children (youth); their needs must be placed at the forefront of our planning. It is the responsibility of the teacher to understand the needs of the students, their capabilities and the ways in which they learn. When planning for the incorporation of Aboriginal content, the learner must be considered. Teachers must realize and respect where the children (youth) are at in this regard: “Knowledge of the children should include a range of information about their present state of mind and heart treated as a stage in development toward their probable destiny as adults” (Schwab, 1973, 503). Where are our children (youth) going with this knowledge? We must understand

this in order to offer them an inclusive education that will help them continue to move forward in life and learning with open minds.

Students will have an identity regardless of their age. Naturally, their identities will be more developed the older they are. Teachers must take into account what the students already know about themselves and how much of this has been influenced by the curriculum. In order to prepare children to learn about each other or others, we must first assist them in learning about themselves. The students' identities must be familiar to them prior to learning about others; this will help them to understand how everyone has a place in the world.

Teacher

Teachers must be willing and active participants in their own learning. It is the responsibility of the teacher to educate themselves in such a way that they are able to provide an education to their students that is inclusive. With the understanding that Aboriginal content inclusion benefits all students, teachers must prepare themselves. As Schwab explains, teachers bring biases with them to the classroom (Schwab, 1973) that may hold them back, but they must continue to move forward. We must challenge ourselves as teachers, support our colleagues and ask for guidance.

In the Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning, Elders, Traditional Knowledge Keepers and community members are also teachers. When we are uncertain or unable to speak to a certain topic these individuals are available to assist and guide us. We must use these individuals and the gifts which they have been given.

Through this study and through my own experiences I have learned that Aboriginal teachers draw upon who they are as Aboriginal people and incorporate this

into the curriculum. The pride these teachers spoke about when describing their teacher identities was also used in the classrooms; the teachers interviewed taught in ways that encouraged their students to think about and build upon their own personal identities.

Milieu

“Relevant milieus include the school and classroom... also the family, the community, the particular groupings of religious, class or ethnic genus” (Schwab, 1973, p. 503). Milieus are influential and can hold their own bias. The child’s (youth’s) milieus are all around them: classroom, school, home and family. We must provide an education that includes Aboriginal content that will allow our students to be productive, informative individuals in all milieus. Students are “world travelers” (Lugones, 1987); they are constantly traveling between worlds that are familiar, comfortable, but also worlds of uncertainty and discomfort. For example, at the end of the day they leave the classroom to return to their homes, communities and religious groups. It is our responsibility to have them return with correct and relevant information about Canada’s Aboriginal people.

Subject Matter

Teachers must be “familiar with the scholarly materials under treatment and with the discipline from which they come” (Schwab, 1973, 502). Teachers must make a commitment to continue with their own learning in order to provide the best possible learning opportunities for their students. Knowledge of the material being presented is important; however, Pohl and Anderson felt it is important for teachers to acknowledge when guidance is needed: “Skilled teachers are aware of their own limitations and handle

shortfall respectfully in the classroom” (Anderson & Pohl, 2002, para. 17). As teachers we are growing and learning with our students and colleagues. When incorporating Aboriginal content into what we are teaching we need to be prepared to commit to (re)educating ourselves as educators; we must be knowledgeable with the materials we are using and presenting to our students.

Designing or creating curriculum for our classrooms is time consuming. Having said this, as teachers, we understand that the benefits for the students are tremendous. When creating curriculum, it is highly beneficial to take into account the Four Common Places (Schwab, 1973) that Schwab has introduced. Schwab explained his reasoning of the Four Common Places in such a way that they fit together like Chinese boxes (Schwab, 1973). All four common places need to be considered: learner, teacher, milieu and subject matter. Curriculum, either created to supplement what we as teachers already have experience with, or for renewal of subject matter, is balanced when Schwab’s Four Common Places are considered.

Telling Stories

Telling the shared stories of the teacher and student participants in a respectful, meaningful manner began as a personal priority and has remained as such to the end of this study. How do we tell these stories and remain respectful of those who have shared? We must guide our students in a direction that assists them in realizing the importance of their family stories; realizing that their family stories are connected to their own stories of who they are, where they are from and how they came to be where they are today.

What is the research telling others?

As teachers we must remain respectful of the space of our colleagues. We cannot tell others what to do. We can speak of our experiences and our research and we can make suggestions. We can share current stories and remembered stories; however, we must understand that for whatever reason, colleagues may view the incorporation of the Aboriginal perspective as an enormous challenge. In turn, this enormous challenge may become what we know as the part of curriculum that is intentionally or unintentionally left out. When this curriculum is left out or when Aboriginal content is not included in what is being taught, all students miss out on learning opportunities. When this occurs, students are being denied the opportunity to learn about our country's history as well as the opportunity to learn about historical events from another perspective. It is important to understand that everyone has their own perspective about the history of Aboriginal people and along with that may come biases, feelings of shame and guilt as well as feelings of empathy. This tension, in turn, may make it especially difficult to fulfill the expectations of incorporating Aboriginal education throughout their teaching.

“The real justification for including Aboriginal cultural knowledge in the modern curriculum is not so that Aboriginal students can compete with non-Aboriginal students in an imagined world. It is, rather, that immigrant [western] society is sorely in need of what Aboriginal knowledge has to offer” (Battiste, 2000, p. 201). Through this research I learned that Aboriginal education is important for all students. When the teacher creates a sense of belonging for all students in the classroom, the learning environment becomes one whereby students can learn not only from the teacher, but from each other as well. As long as teachers do not include Aboriginal content, students are lacking an important

and valuable perspective; Aboriginal students are lacking a perspective that is familiar to them. We must continue and in many cases begin to be inclusive; the benefits are for all students.

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Appendix A



UNIVERSITY OF
SASKATCHEWAN

Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB)

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Janet McVittie

DEPARTMENT
Curriculum Studies

BEH#
10-232

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CONDUCTED
University of Saskatchewan

STUDENT RESEARCHERS
Tamara Chief

SPONSOR
UNFUNDED

TITLE
Inclusion of First Nations and Metis Culture into the Curriculum: Teacher and Student Identity Development

ORIGINAL REVIEW DATE
10-Sep-2010

APPROVAL ON
15-Oct-2010

APPROVAL OF
Ethics Application
Consent Protocol

EXPIRY DATE
15-Oct-2011

Full Board Meeting ☐

Date of Full Board Meeting:

Delegated Review ☒

Expedited Review: ☐

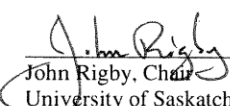
CERTIFICATION

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions: http://www.usask.ca/research/ethics_review/


John Rigby, Chair
University of Saskatchewan
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

Please send all correspondence to:

Research Ethics Office
University of Saskatchewan
Box 5000 RPO University, 1602-110 Gymnasium Place
Saskatoon SK S7N 4J8

Appendix B: Letters and Contracts for Parents/Guardians

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Tammy Chief and I am a teacher with the Saskatoon Public Board of Education, however I am currently a full-time student at the University of Saskatchewan. I am presently researching the outcomes of student and teacher identity when the teacher presents from an Aboriginal perspective with the incorporation of Aboriginal cultural knowledge. The research will involve classroom observations and an interview with your child's/student's teacher and several students, (in some cases students who have graduated). The purpose of this research is to learn how student and teacher identities are positively affected when the teacher is able to present from an Aboriginal perspective and incorporate Aboriginal cultural knowledge in their lessons.

Your child/student has been invited to be involved in an interview as part of this research. This opportunity will help me to learn how teacher and student identities are affected when the teacher presents from an Aboriginal perspective. The purpose of the study is to learn about how this can or may affect teacher and student identity and how presenting from an Aboriginal perspective affects learning opportunities for students. The teacher has also been invited to participate in a similar interview. I am interested in learning how this approach impacts your child/student and to learn if your child/student is engaged in learning in a more meaningful way. Your child's/student's participation in this study will assist me and other students and teachers in their learning.

Participation will be in the form of an interview. There will be one interview that will last approximately one hour. The interviews will be conversational in style and there are approximately ten open-ended questions. This interview will take place in your

child/student's school. During the interview I will also ask your child/student to discuss assignments and other learning opportunities they've had that involve Aboriginal culture or where the teacher has presented from an Aboriginal perspective. I would like to audio-record the interviews. **At any time during the interview, your child/student may turn off the recorder and ask that notes not be made of what they say.** The audio-recordings and notes will be typed (transcribed) and the typed copies (transcripts) will then be returned to your child/student for a review. They will be asked at that time to review the transcripts and change anything that they believe was mis-transcribed, mis-interpreted, or even those things which they said but no longer agree with. I will also visit the classroom to make observations and take notes about what I observe.

Once your child/student has signed off on the transcripts, I will combine all the information we have collected and use this to complete the research. The results of the findings may be used for publications in academic and professional journals and for presentations at conferences. A benefit of this study is a richer understanding of student and teacher identities when the teacher is able to present from an Aboriginal perspective with the incorporation of Aboriginal culture in their lessons. Your child/student might become upset while talking about identity, although this is very unlikely. In the unlikely event of this happening, I will ensure that your child/student visits with the school counselor.

Please note that your child/student will have the right to withdraw from the study until transcripts are signed off and may ask that anything they have contributed be removed. This research study has been approved by the Research Ethics Board of the University of Saskatchewan on (DATE). If you have any concerns about the ethics of

this study, you may contact them at (306) 966-2084. If you are out of town, you may call collect.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please contact my research advisor at (306) 966-7582 or me at 382-6451 and more details will be provided. If you are out of town, you may call collect. You may also email either of us:

janet.mcvittie@usask.ca or tad.128@usask.ca

Thank you,

Tammy Chief

Letter of parental consent

Your child/student is invited to participate in a research project entitled **Inclusion of First Nations and Métis Culture into the Curriculum: Teacher and Student Identity Development**. This form will confirm your consent for your child/student to participate in this study. Please read carefully and feel free to ask questions.

Researcher(s):

Tammy Chief, Department of Curriculum Studies, 966-7582;

email: tad128@mail.usask.ca.

Dr. Janet McVittie, Department of Curriculum Studies, 966-7582;

email: janet.mcvittie@usask.ca;

Purpose and Procedure: The purpose of this study is to learn about student and teacher identity development and other potential benefits when the curriculum is taught from an Aboriginal perspective and/or with the incorporation of Aboriginal cultural content. The procedure involves one interview with your child/student and classroom observations in your child's/student's class. Along with this, your child/student will be involved with reviewing and modifying their personal transcripts to ensure accuracy and completion. The interview will take place at a time and location that is mutually convenient for your child/student. The interview will take place in November 2010 and the transcripts will be reviewed in November or December 2010.

The study, transcription review and modifications will take place throughout the first semester (October 2010 – December 2010). Final results will be published in aggregated form, with direct quotations added to support researcher findings. Papers may

be published in both academic and professional journals and possibly shared at conferences.

Potential Benefits: A potential benefit is to learn how teacher and student identities are positively affected when the teacher presents from an Aboriginal perspective with the incorporation of Aboriginal cultural content.

Potential Risks: The risk with this study is that the students will be invited to share about their identity. If a student becomes upset during the interview I will ensure that they have the opportunity to speak with a high school counselor. I will only interview students at their school where a counselor is always available.

Storage of Data: Raw data – interview transcripts – will be stored in a locked office at the University of Saskatchewan for a period of five years after the completion of the study. After five years, the raw data will be destroyed.

Confidentiality: Interviews will be between the researcher and participant only. I (the researcher) guarantee that the results of the interview will be held in confidence. I will honour your child's/student's identity and keep them anonymous throughout the study. When a statement stands out as unique or identifying, particular care will be taken in representing their identity. Also, your child/student will have their comments verified for use before any publication.

Right to Withdraw: Your child's/student's participation is voluntary, and they can answer only those questions that they are comfortable with. There is no guarantee that they will personally benefit from their involvement. They may withdraw from the research project for any reason without penalty of any sort. Their right to withdraw data from the study will apply until transcripts are signed off; after this it is possible that some

form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw their data.

Questions: If you have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to ask at any point. You are also free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided if you have other questions. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on (DATE). Any questions regarding your child's/student's rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect.

Follow-Up or Debriefing: I will contact your child/student once after the interview so they can read over their transcripts and make modifications as they see necessary.

Giving Consent: To indicate your agreement for your child/student to participate, please sign the *top* of the following page. You need to hand in only that page in the envelope provided.

To indicate that you are not giving permission for your child/student to participate, please sign the *bottom* of the next page. You need to hand in only that page in the envelope provided.

I will come to collect the envelope at your child's/student's school.

PLEASE COMPLETE THIS PAGE AND SUBMIT IT IN THE ENVELOPE

PROVIDED

Consent to Participate:

I have read and understood the description provided. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent for my child/student to participate in the research project, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any time. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records. I have read and understood that my child/student will have the opportunity to review, add, alter or delete any part of the transcripts that contain what they have shared through the Transcript Release form.

(Name of Parent/Guardian of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Parent/Guardian of Participant)

(Signature of Researcher)

Statement to not give consent for participation:

I have read and understood the description provided. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

I choose not to give permission for my child/student to participate in this study and indicate this by signing below. I understand that by doing this, I can remain anonymous in my decision.

(Name of Parent/Guardian of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Parent/Guardian of Participant)

(Signature of Researcher)

Appendix C: Letters and Contracts of Assent for Students

Dear Student,

My name is Tammy Chief and I am a teacher with the Saskatoon Public Board of Education, however I am currently a full-time student at the University of Saskatchewan. I am presently researching the outcomes of student and teacher identity when the teacher presents from an Aboriginal perspective with the incorporation of Aboriginal cultural knowledge. The research will involve classroom observations and an interview with the teacher and several students. The purpose of this research is to learn how student and teacher identities are positively affected when the teacher is able to present from an Aboriginal perspective and incorporate Aboriginal knowledge in their lessons.

You are invited to be involved in an interview as part of this research. This opportunity will help me to learn how teacher and student identities are affected when the teacher presents from an Aboriginal perspective. The purpose of the study is to learn about how this can or may affect teacher and student identity and how presenting from an Aboriginal perspective affects learning opportunities for students. The teacher has also been invited to participate in a similar interview. I am interested in learning how this approach impacts you and to learn if you are engaged in learning in a more meaningful way. Your participation in this study will assist me and other students and teachers in their learning.

Participation will be in the form of an interview. There will be one interview that will last approximately one hour. The interviews will be conversational in style and there are approximately ten open-ended questions. This interview will take place in your school. During the interview I will also ask you to discuss assignments and other learning opportunities you've had that involve Aboriginal culture or where the teacher

has presented from an Aboriginal perspective. I would like to audio-record the interviews. **At any time during the interview, you may turn off the recorder and ask that notes not be made of what you say.** The audio-recordings and notes will be typed (transcribed) and the typed copies (transcripts) will then be returned to you for a review. You will be asked at that time to review the transcripts and change anything that you believe was mis-transcribed, mis-interpreted, or even those things which you said but no longer agree with. I will also visit the classroom to make observations and take notes about what I observe.

Once you have signed off on the transcripts, I will combine all the information I have collected and use this to complete the research. The results of the findings may be used for publications in academic and professional journals and for presentations at conferences. A benefit of this study is a richer understanding of student and teacher identities when the teacher is able to present from an Aboriginal perspective with the incorporation of Aboriginal culture in their lessons. You might become upset while talking about identity, although this is very unlikely. In the unlikely event of this happening, I will ensure that you visit with the school counselor. If you think that answering questions about identity might be too emotional, you do not have to answer.

Please note that you will have the right to withdraw from the study until transcripts are signed off and may ask that anything they have contributed be removed. This research study has been approved by the Research Ethics Board of the University of Saskatchewan on (DATE). If you have any concerns about the ethics of this study, you may contact them at (306) 966-2084. If you are out of town, you may call collect.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please contact my research advisor at (306) 966-7582 or me at 382-6451 and more details will be provided. If you are out of town, you may call collect. You may also email either of us:

janet.mcvittie@usask.ca or tad.128@usask.ca

Thank you,

Tammy Chief

Letter of Student Assent

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled **Inclusion of First Nations and Métis Culture into the Curriculum: Teacher and Student Identity Development**. This form will confirm your consent to participate in this study. Please read carefully and feel free to ask questions.

Researcher(s):

Tammy Chief, Department of Curriculum Studies, 966-7582;

email: tad128@mail.usask.ca.

Dr. Janet McVittie, Department of Curriculum Studies, 966-7582;

email: janet.mcvittie@usask.ca;

Purpose and Procedure: The purpose of this study is to learn about student and teacher identity development and other potential benefits when the curriculum is taught from an Aboriginal perspective and/or with the incorporation of Aboriginal cultural content. You will be asked to participate in one interview. You will be involved with reviewing and modifying your personal transcripts to ensure accuracy and completion. Research will take place in your presence and alongside the students (classroom observation). Personal interviews will take place at a time and location that is convenient for you. The interview will take place in October 2010 and the transcripts will be reviewed in November 2010.

The study, transcription review and modifications will take place throughout the first semester (October 2010 – November 2010). Final results will be published in aggregated form, with direct quotations added to support researcher findings. Papers may

be published in both academic and professional journals and possibly shared at conferences.

Potential Benefits: A potential benefit is to learn how teacher and student identities are positively affected when the teacher presents from an Aboriginal perspective with the incorporation of Aboriginal cultural content.

Potential Risks: The risk with this study is that you will be invited to share about your identity. If you become upset during the interview I will ensure that you have the opportunity to speak with a high school counselor. I will only interview you at your school when a counselor is always available.

Storage of Data: Raw data – interview transcripts – will be stored in a locked office at the University of Saskatchewan for a period of five years after the completion of the study. After five years, the raw data will be destroyed.

Confidentiality: Interviews will be between the researcher and participant only. I (the researcher) guarantee that the results of the interview will be held in confidence. I will honour your identity and keep you anonymous throughout the study. When a statement stands out as unique or identifying, particular care will be taken in representing your identity. Also, you will have your comments verified for use before any publication.

Right to Withdraw: Your participation is voluntary, and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. There is no guarantee that you will personally benefit from your involvement. The information that is shared will be held in strict confidence and discussed only with the research team. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason without penalty of any sort. Your right to withdraw data from the study will apply until transcripts have been signed off; after this it is possible

that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your data.

Questions: If you have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to ask at any point. You are also free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided if you have other questions. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on (DATE). Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect.

Follow-Up or Debriefing: I will contact you once after the interview so you can read over your transcripts and make modifications as you see necessary.

Giving Consent: To indicate your agreement to participate, please sign the *top* of the following page. You need to hand in only that page in the envelope provided.

To indicate that you are not agreeing to participate, please sign the *bottom* of the next page. You need to hand in only that page in the envelope provided.

I will come to collect the envelope at your school.

PLEASE COMPLETE THIS PAGE AND SUBMIT IT IN THE ENVELOPE

PROVIDED

Consent to Participate:

I have read and understood the description provided. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any time. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records. I have read and understood that I will have the opportunity to review, add, alter or delete any part of the transcripts that contain what I have shared through the Transcript Release form.

(Name of Student Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Student Participant)

(Signature of Researcher)

Statement to not give consent for participation:

I have read and understood the description provided. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

I choose not to participate in this study and indicate this by signing below. I understand that by doing this, I can remain anonymous in my decision.

(Name of Student Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Student Participant)

(Signature of Researcher)

Appendix D: Letters and Contracts for Teachers

Dear (teacher),

My name is Tammy Chief and I am a teacher with the Saskatoon Public Board of Education, however I am currently a full-time student at the University of Saskatchewan. I am presently researching the outcomes of student and teacher identity when the teacher presents from an Aboriginal perspective with the incorporation of Aboriginal cultural knowledge. The research will involve classroom observations and an interview with both teachers and students. The purpose of this research is to learn how student and teacher identities are positively affected when the teacher is able to present from an Aboriginal perspective and incorporate Aboriginal knowledge in their lessons.

You are invited to be involved in an interview as part of this research. I am also asking your permission to observe the students in your classroom following the interview. This opportunity will help me to learn how teacher and student identities are affected when the teacher is able to present from an Aboriginal perspective. I will also ask you to identify five to ten students who are likely to want to be involved in the study, of which I will contact, and continue until I have one or two, who agree. The purpose of the study is to learn about how this can or may affect teacher and student identity and how presenting from an Aboriginal perspective improves learning opportunities for students. I am interested in learning how this approach impacts your teaching and to learn if you believe your students are more engaged in their learning in a more meaningful way. Your participation in this study will assist me and other students and teachers in their learning.

Your participation will be in the form of an interview and allowing me to observe in your classroom. There will be one interview that will last approximately one hour. The interviews will be conversational in style and there are approximately ten open-ended questions. This interview will take place in your school or at a location that is convenient for you. During the interview I will also ask you to discuss teaching perspectives and Aboriginal cultural content you have included in your lessons and how this may have affected your teaching identity or the identities of any of your students. I would like to audio-record the interview. **At any time during the interview, you may turn off the recorder and ask that notes not be made of what you say.** The audio-recordings and notes will be typed (transcribed) and the typed copies (transcripts) will then be returned to you for your review. You will be asked at that time to review the transcripts and change anything that you believe was mis-transcribed, mis-interpreted, or even those things which you said but you no longer agree with. During the classroom observation I will take notes about what I observe.

Once you have signed off on the transcripts, I will combine all the information I have collected and use this to complete the research. The results of the findings may be used for publications in academic and professional journals and for presentations at conferences. I will also provide you, the teacher, a copy of the final version of the thesis once it is complete. A benefit of this study is a richer understanding of student and teacher identities when the teacher is able to present from an Aboriginal perspective with the incorporation of Aboriginal culture in their lessons.

Please note that at any point in the research, you have the right to withdraw and ask that anything you have contributed be removed. Your right to withdraw data from the study will apply until transcripts have been signed off; after this it is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your data.

This research study has been approved by the Research Ethics Board of the University of Saskatchewan on (DATE). If you have any concerns about the ethics of this study, you may contact them at (306) 966-2084. If you are out of town, you may call collect.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please contact my research advisor at (306) 966-7582 or me at 382-6451 and more details will be provided. If you are out of town, you may call collect. You may also email either of us: janet.mcvittie@usask.ca or tad.128@usask.ca

Thank you,

Tammy Chief

Letter of Consent

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled **Inclusion of First Nations and Métis Culture into the Curriculum: Teacher and Student Identity Development.**

This form will confirm your consent to participate in this study. Please read carefully and feel free to ask questions.

Researcher(s):

Tammy Chief, Department of Curriculum Studies, 966-7582;
email: tad128@mail.usask.ca.

Dr. Janet McVittie, Department of Curriculum Studies, 966-7582;
email: janet.mcvittie@usask.ca;

Purpose and Procedure: The purpose of this study is to learn about student and teacher identity development and other potential benefits when the curriculum is taught from an Aboriginal perspective and/or with the incorporation of Aboriginal cultural content. The procedures involve classroom observations, interviews, and discussions regarding your approach to teaching. Along with this, you will be involved with reviewing and modifying your personal transcripts to ensure accuracy and completion. Research will take place in your presence and alongside the students (classroom observation). Personal interviews will take place at a time and location that is mutually convenient for the researcher and the participant. You will be asked to participate in one interview. The interview will take place in October 2010 and the transcripts will be reviewed in November 2010.

The study, transcription review and modifications will take place throughout the first semester (October 2010 – November 2010). Final results will be published in

aggregated form, with direct quotations added to support researcher findings. Papers may be published in both academic and professional journals and possibly shared at conferences.

Potential Benefits: A potential benefit is to learn how teacher and student identities are positively affected when the teacher presents from an Aboriginal perspective with the incorporation of Aboriginal cultural content.

Potential Risks: The risk with this study is that the students will be invited to share about their identity. If a student becomes upset during the interview I will ensure that they have the opportunity to speak with a high school counselor. I will only interview students at their school where a counselor is always available.

Storage of Data: Raw data – interview transcripts – will be stored in a locked office at the University of Saskatchewan for a period of five years after the completion of the study. After five years, the raw data will be destroyed.

Confidentiality: Interviews will be between the researcher and participant only. I (the researcher) guarantee that the results of the interview will be held in confidence. I will honour your identity and keep you anonymous throughout the study. When a statement stands out as unique or identifying, particular care will be taken in representing your identity. Also, you will have your comments verified for use before any publication.

Right to Withdraw: Your participation is voluntary, and you can answer only those questions that you are comfortable with. There is no guarantee that you will personally benefit from your involvement. The information that is shared will be held in strict confidence and discussed only with the research team. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason without penalty of any sort. Your right to withdraw data

from the study will apply until data has been signed off; after this it is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your data.

Questions: If you have any questions concerning the research project, please feel free to ask at any point. You are also free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided if you have other questions. This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on (DATE). Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect.

Follow-Up or Debriefing: I will contact you once after the interview so you can read over your transcripts and make modifications as you see necessary. I will also send you a url for my final thesis when it is completed. If I publish a paper from the research, I will send a copy to you. Your participation is valued.

Giving Consent: To indicate your agreement to participate, please sign the *top* of the following page. You need to hand in only that page in the envelope provided.

To indicate that you are not agreeing to participate, please sign the *bottom* of the next page. You need to hand in only that page in the envelope provided.

I will come to collect the envelope at your school.

PLEASE COMPLETE THIS PAGE AND SUBMIT IT IN THE ENVELOPE

PROVIDED

Consent to Participate:

I have read and understood the description provided. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project, understanding that I may withdraw my consent at any time. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records. I have read and understood that I will have the opportunity to review, add, alter or delete any part of the transcripts that contain what I have shared through the Transcript Release form.

(Name of Teacher Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Teacher Participant)

(Signature of Researcher)

Statement to not give consent for participation:

I have read and understood the description provided. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

I choose not to participate in this study and indicate this by signing below. I understand that by doing this, I can remain anonymous in my decision.

(Name of Teacher Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Teacher Participant)

(Signature of Researcher)

Appendix E: Transcript Release Form

Inclusion of First Nations and Métis Culture into the Curriculum: Teacher and Student Identity Development

Transcript Release Form

I, _____, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interview in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview with Tamara (Tammy) Chief. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Tamara (Tammy) Chief to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Signature of Researcher

Appendix F: Interview Questions for Teacher Participants

Note: These are the general questions, but there may be some changes after I complete classroom observations.

1. In a few words, describe your personal identity. (who you are, where you are from)
2. In your own words, describe your teacher identity.
3. Describe your teaching responsibilities.
4. What does it mean to you to teach or present from an Aboriginal perspective?
5. In your opinion, can a non-Aboriginal teacher teach or present from an Aboriginal perspective?
6. Are you able to present from an Aboriginal perspective and/or do you use First Nations and/or Métis cultural content in your teachings?
7. If you feel as though you are able to present from an Aboriginal perspective, what do you do that is different from teaching from a non-Aboriginal perspective?
8. In your opinion, do students benefit from having the curriculum presented from a First Nations or Métis perspective or from having Aboriginal cultural content included in their class?
 - If you believe Aboriginal students benefit, explain.
 - If you believe non-Aboriginal students benefit, explain.
9. Do you think the identities of the students are affected when the curriculum is presented from a First Nations or Métis perspective or when Aboriginal cultural content is included?
 - If you believe the identities of the Aboriginal students are affected, how so?
 - If you believe the identities of the non-Aboriginal students are affected, how so?

10. Are there any supports for teachers who use or would like to incorporate First Nations and Métis cultural content into the curriculum?
11. In your opinion, is there a high importance placed on the inclusion of First Nations or Métis cultural content in classrooms?
12. In your opinion, do students feel a greater sense of belonging either when the curriculum is presented from an Aboriginal perspective or when there is an inclusion of First Nations or Métis content in the teachings? Explain your answer.
13. In your opinion, does teaching from the Aboriginal perspective foster a positive learning environment for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students alike?
14. In what ways has your identity changed as a result of teaching from an Aboriginal perspective?

Appendix G: Interview Questions for Student Participants

Note: These are the general questions, but there may be some changes after I complete classroom observations.

1. Describe your personal identity (who you are, where you are from).
2. Does your personal identity play a role in any of your current classes?
 - If yes, how so?
 - If no, why not?
3. Does your teacher present any or all of the material from an Aboriginal perspective?
 - How do you know this?
4. Is being in a class where the teacher is able to present from an Aboriginal perspective important to you? Why or why not?
5. When the teacher presents the material from an Aboriginal perspective does this affect your identity in any way? Explain.
6. Does your teacher incorporate Aboriginal culture into what is being taught?
7. Is the incorporation of Aboriginal culture into what is being taught important to you?
8. When the teacher incorporates Aboriginal culture into what is being taught, does this affect your identity in any way? Explain.
9. In your opinion, is it important for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students to be in a class where the material is being presented from an Aboriginal perspective? Explain.

10. In your opinion is it important for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students to be in a class where Aboriginal cultural content is included in the teaching? Explain.